Savonarola

Piero Misciattelli

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This new biography deviates considerably from the accepted narratives of the life and death of the great martyr Savonarola, the last apostle of mediaeval Christian faith. Pope Alexander VI is shown to have been unaware of the false trial of Savonarola in Florence and that he showed great forbearance with the rebel friar. A diligent re-examination of the documentary evidence puts the blame on the changeableness of the Florentines and shows the portrait of the protagonist in full relief against the tumult of strife which agitated Florence at the end of the fifteenth century.

SAVONAROLA

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PORTRAIT OF FRA GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA IN R. MUSEO OF SAN MARCO, FLORENCE
(FRA BARTOLOMEO)

SAVONAROLA

by

PIERO MISCIATTELLI

Translated by

M. PETERS-ROBERTS

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Preface

The figure of Girolamo Savonarola, irradiated with the halo of martyrdom, stands out on the pages of history as one of the noblest and purest assertors of his own political and religious faith. The unfortunate Dominican Friar is the greatest protagonist, the innocent and heroic victim of a grandiose human drama enacted during the Italian Renaissance, when there flourished in Florence the most celebrated artists, and when, thanks to the studies of learned humanists, there was a revival of the cult of ancient Greek wisdom united with the taste for classic Latinity.

Savonarola is in truth a representative man, and therefore excites a universal interest. I believe that in him can be discerned the last apostle of mediæval Christian faith. He tried to swim against the current. With the violence of a Biblical prophet he condemned the corruption of a society permeated with paganism, and gave up his life to awakening in his contemporaries a desire for higher ideals and for a practical Christian life. He was not a heretic, but the true precursor of the Catholic Counter-reform. He rebelled against the Rome of Alexander VI, moved by the same zeal which had in the Middle Ages inspired a saint like Pier Damiani. The life of Savonarola is best known to the English-reading public through the masterly work of

N12564

Pasquale Villari, the most authoritative modern historian of the Ferrarese Friar.

The portrait of Savonarola which I have tried to draw in this book differs in many respects from that of Villari. Readers of Villari's book remain under the impression that it was the Pontiff Alexander VI who was chiefly responsible for the death of Savonarola. But the conduct of Alexander VI, although often greatly to be blamed, must also be judged, with regard to Savonarola, with greater impartiality, according to the documents which we possess. There is no doubt but that he showed great forbearance with the rebel Friar; and, on the other hand, there does not exist any testimony of that time, nor any document, which attests or makes us suppose that the Pope was aware of the false trial devised in Florence to work harm to Savonarola. My opinion is that the responsibility for the death of the Friar falls chiefly on the Florentine faction of the Arrabbiati. Villari has not continued the history of the dramatic events which followed the Friar's death. I have tried after a diligent examination of documents to show the passionate changeableness of the Florentines with regard to Savonarola, in order that the portrait of the protagonist may be shown in full relief amidst the tumult of the spiritual and political strife which agitated Florence at the end of the fifteenth century.

PIERO MISCIATTELLI

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CHAPTER I

The Court of Borso d'Este

GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA was born in Ferrara on the 21st of September, 1452, two years after the accession to power of Borso d'Este, a natural son of Niccolò III.

As the customs and habits of Ferrara had an immense influence on the formation of Savonarola's character, and his ultimate choice of the cloister was largely due to the excesses and extravagances which prevailed in the Court of Borso, it may be useful to glance briefly at its history during that time.

Borso d'Este was a man of keen intellect; his tastes were luxurious; he was a fearless rider, a lover of the chase, of tournaments, feastings and revellings, and a patron of the fine arts and learning. In his sumptuous palaces, where he kept up the pomp and magnificence of an oriental potentate, he surrounded himself with all that art and refinement could contribute to further his personal pleasures, being always robed in the richest brocades and silk, resplendent with pearls and precious stones.

There were frequent disputes between the different Italian States during his reign. But Borso took no sides.

He observed such a strict neutrality that he often acted as arbitrator in matters of controversy. This neutrality was of immense advantage to his subjects, who enjoyed the benefits of a land at peace, while he himself amassed much wealth which was spent on works of art and personal enjoyments. He was an excellent man of business. His administration of public affairs, together with the fair way in which he imposed taxes, earned for him the title of "The Just." He had strong common sense, a well-balanced mind, and intense pride of family. It was his ambition that the House of d'Este should be chief of all the princely families of Italy, and this is why he obtained from the Emperor Frederick III the title of Duke. He was idolised by his subjects, who on his death in 1471 exclaimed that "a god had died." Such was the spirit of the humanist courtiers of his day, that they saw in Borso, so poor in heroic virtues, all the attributes of a "god."

Ferrara, during the reigns of Lionello, Borso and Ercole, was at the height of her opulence and glory. She was the first *modern* city in Europe. Her streets were broad and regular, her palaces well-proportioned, and her well-ordered central administrative offices directed and gave impetus to all kinds of industry. The Guilds of Arts and Crafts were in a flourishing condition. Expert craftsmen were busy in all the workshops. There were makers of tapestries and gorgeous embroideries from France and Flanders; jewellers and watch-

makers from Lombardy; engravers, metal workers, inlayers, leather workers, gilders, armourers. In the peace of the cloisters most excellent miniature-painters decorated with delicacy and taste the pages of gorgeous books, such as the famous *Bibbia di Borso*. The most celebrated artists and sculptors of the day helped to embellish the lovely villas of Benvegnante, Ostellato, Bellombra, Schifanoia, Belriguardo, and Belfiore, while famous architects, like Rigone, Brasavola, and Pietro Benvenuti were employed to build many of the public edifices. The tower of the cathedral, begun many years before, was now finished. The vast Certosa, a worthy monument of the Duke's munificence, was presented by him (with a suitable endowment) to the monks of Grenoble in 1461.

During this time there was an influx of rich exiles from every part of Italy, and especially from Florence, to this city of so much splendour and gaiety.

The pompous and hospitable Court received them with open arms, and their life was just a succession of feastings and revellings. Borso's principal artists were Galasso, Bono, and Cosmè Tura. The latter soon became his favourite. He lived in the ducal palace, and figures amongst Borso's "pensioners." He was only about twenty when he first started doing humble work for the Duke. He would paint a "Palio," which was given as prize to the victor in the races run on St. George's Day; then he would design and paint lovely

little caskets which Borso loved to present to his many mistresses. Another time he would decorate with gold and silver the trappings of the horses and the robes of the horsemen in a tournament. His versatility was wonderful. He satisfied all the fantastic vagaries of his patron. He designed cartoons for tapestries, and painted wonderful pictures for the Duke's study at Belfiore. Unfortunately, only one of the cartoons remains; it is the delightful allegory of spring in the National Gallery, London. Borso recommended his young *protégé* to his friends, so that commissions poured in upon him from all over the country. Many Signori gave him orders for pictures to place in public buildings, and one very famous picture was painted by him for the Public Library of the Signori della Mirandola. In most of the frescoes painted by Tura and his disciples, and especially those by Francesco del Cossa at Schifanoia, it is the gay life of Ferrara and the glory and popularity of Borso which furnish the principal themes, so that looking at them it is possible to form a very good idea of Ferrarese life.

In the large salon of Schifanoia the walls are divided into twelve panels, each panel representing a month of the year. On first entering the room the eye is charmed with the general effect. The exquisite pagan compositions, with their vague allegories of philosophy and astrology, harmonise perfectly with the scenes illustrating Borso's life. In this poem of colour and of form,

dedicated to the joys and pleasures of the powerful Duke, there seem to be set free and amplified all the sweet seductions of the senses, and the subtle speculations of humanist teaching.

In the panel representing the month of March, Cossa shows the triumph of Minerva. The goddess, armed with a sword, her shield at her feet, is seated in a car drawn by unicorns, and surrounded by two groups of people. On one side are maidens, intent on their sewing, embroidery and weaving, and on the other is a group of humanists, lecturers, and students of Ferrara University. At the bottom of the panel, Borso with his companions is seen seated in a Court of Justice, listening benignly to the supplications of some of his humble subjects. A little farther on he appears again, this time mounted on a white horse, surrounded by his courtiers and falconers, all waiting to start on a hunting expedition. The procession is seen going along the country road, a bright pleasure-seeking cavalcade, full of gaiety and light-heartedness. In the fields we get occasional glimpses of diligent peasants pruning their vines.

The next picture represents April and the triumph of Venus. This panel depicts with astounding boldness the profligacy of the Ferrarese. The goddess is seen sitting in a car drawn by white swans, and at her feet, bound in chains, there kneels a mail-clad warrior. All around Nature flourishes in the warm wind. Men and

beasts yield themselves unrestrainedly to the full indulgence of their sensual desires. Lust and revelry abound. On a little hill to the right is shown, as in a lyric vision, a nude group of the three Graces. Below, a band of youths and maidens toying with musical instruments kiss and embrace in utter abandonment, and a little to the left, near to a thick grove of pomegranates, is yet another scene of lasciviousness. Borso exchanges vulgar jests with his buffoon, while his courtiers laugh at each obscene witticism. At the top of the panel we get a view of the Via dei Sabboni, during the feasts of St. George, the patron of Ferrara. The loggias and balconies are decorated with flags, and the street is crowded with men, women, and children, all running hither and thither, the better to see the races which are being run. The whole scene is a riot of gaiety and light-heartedness—not a note of sadness, not a sign of seriousness. Banished is everything which does not add to the gay, frivolous existence of the Ferrarese. Who now remembers the sermons of Bernardino of Siena, when the whole population turned out to hear him preach? All the old decent customs are forgotten! All the Christian virtues are thrown on one side! Nothing remains but vice, pleasure, and self-indulgence.

. . . . . .

Borso is respectful but indifferent to religious precepts, and lives his gay life in the midst of his courtiers, composed of humanists, poets, famous artists, lovely

smiling women, young coxcombs, musicians, singers, parasites, men of arms, and buffoons.

This is the picture of Ferrara in 1452.

. . . . . .

During the first ten years of Borso's reign there could be seen, among the heterogeneous collection of men at the Court, one member of the Duke's suite who differed from all the others. This was a celebrated scientist from Padua, called Michele Savonarola, who had been invited by Niccolò III (the friend and protector of learned men), to come to Ferrara as Court physician. He was a distinguished-looking elderly man, universally respected, and honoured also by Borso, until his death in 1462.

Michele had a son whom he named Niccolò, probably in memory of the kind patron who had loaded him with honours and gifts of every kind. This Niccolò was a spendthrift, who did not care for work or serious study. He had married a lady called Elena, of the illustrious family of Bonaccorsi of Mantua. Fra Benedetto, who was an intimate friend of the Savonarolas, describes Elena as a "woman of lofty sentiments and strong character." They had seven children, and the third son was Girolamo, who was born on the 21st of September, 1452, and baptised on St. Francis' Day, in the church of Santa Maria del Vaio. His godfather was Francesco di Ribanore, Councillor of the Duke. The names given to the child were Girolamo Maria Francesco Matteo.

While the father squandered most of his days at Court, the little boy, who was the darling of his grandfather, grew up under the vigilant care of a mother who was stern, but loving. Throughout his life Girolamo retained the deepest affection for his mother, and his rectitude of character and strength of mind were undoubtedly the result of her early training. His grandfather, who was so proud of his profession, entertained hopes that his little grandson would follow in his steps; and with this end in view he personally supervised the child's early studies. The scientific training of mind, the independence of judgment, and the love of enquiry which were characteristic traits of Girolamo's later life were instilled into his mind when learning his first lessons with his wise grandfather. Burlamacchi, Girolamo's friend and biographer, writes: "Girolamo Savonarola never followed the advice and opinion of other people, but fixed his eyes on Truth and Reason. When he found that an author did not give him satisfaction he would simply say to his teacher that 'the book did not please him,' and would leave it alone. He gave up his days and nights to study, and the progress which he made, especially in Latin and composition (and also in the liberal arts for a time), was so marvellous that he very soon outstripped all his fellow students."

And all this time, concealed, but burning in his heart, there glowed a mystic flame!

Even when quite a tender little lad he loved to be alone, and he would play at making tiny altars and other toys of a devotional character, copying what he had seen in the churches.

As he grew older, this instinctive, precocious desire for solitude, silence and meditation became stronger and stronger, and there grew in him a disgust for those worldly men who in the gay city of Ferrara wallowed in luxury and feastings, men forgetful of every Christian virtue, dragged down by their lusts, drawn into the turbid stream of every corruption, and so beguiled by every passing pleasure that they had forgotten the end for which God had created them. Savonarola's spirit was stirred within him. He wanted to do something to stem the tide of corruption. But how? He is alone. The crowd passes by unheeding. Now and then, noting his sad countenance, somebody may show him sympathy, but the majority only laugh at him. Some think him proud, others think him foolish, but nobody understands him. Some of the scenes which he witnessed in his own city filled him with despair, for he saw how little his fellow citizens understood the deepest needs of life. There was one spectacle which must have left a deep impression on his mind. The Pope Pio II came to pay a visit to Ferrara, and Borso prepared for the event a series of magnificent feasts. On the day of arrival, the Duke, in a superb barge, went up the river Po

to meet the Pontiff at a spot where there was assembled a multitude of youths and maidens, dressed in white, waving garlands of flowers, and where the statues of all the pagan gods had been placed! The Olympian deities doing homage to the Vicar of Christ!

Only once did Savonarola visit the Court, and never after would he set foot in the ducal palace. His thoughts turned instead to a deeper study of the Bible and of the philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas d'Aquinas. During the brief intervals of leisure which he allowed himself in this period of fastings, meditations, and study, he would occasionally improvise verses which throbbed with the echo of those pent-up feelings of rebellion against the world which were hidden within him. He loved to play on the lute, but his melodies, like his verses, were always sad and mournful.

Only a few of these early verses have been preserved. Most of them he destroyed. One written when he was barely twenty is entitled *De Ruina Mundi,* and in it is shown the agony of mind which disturbs this youth, whose soul craves for the reign of Christ upon earth. In the first eleven lines he speaks of the blindness of a world that follows and adores an indecent Court:

Se non è pur vero e così credo,
Rettor del mondo, che infinita sia
Tua providenzia; nè già mai potria
Creder contra, perchè ab experto el vedo;

A DRAWING BY LEONARDO DA VINCI OF A PORTRAIT OF SAVONAROLA
GALLERIA UFFIZI, GABINETTO DELLE STAMPE, FLORENCE

Talor seria via più che neve fredo,
Vedendo sotto sopra volto el mondo,
Et esser spenta al fondo
Ogne virtute et ogne bel costume,
Non trovo un vivo lume,
Nè pur chi de' suoi vizii se vergogni;
Chi te nega, chi dice che tu sogni.

(The whole world is upset, every virtue and goodness has disappeared and there is no one who feels any shame for his sins.)

. . . . . .

In the eleven lines that follow, Savonarola scorns with disdain those who live on the spoils of rapine and fraudulence:

Felice ormai chi vive di rapina,
E chi de l'altrui sangue più si pasce,
Chi vedoe spoglia e suoi pupilli in fasce,
E chi di povri corre a la ruina!
Quell'anima è gentile e peregrina,
Che per fraude o per forza fa più acquisto,
Chi sprezza il ciel con Cristo,
E sempre pensa altrui cacciar al fondo;
Colui onora il mondo
Che ha pien di latrocinii libri e carte
E chi d'ogne mal far sa meglio l'arte.

(Happy now is he who lives by rapine; feeding on the blood of others, who despoils widows and infants, and hastens the ruin of the poor.)

He is only twenty and yet is neither dazzled nor deceived by the pomps of the Court of d'Este, by the wonderful artistic productions, and by the splendours of the Renaissance. Temperamentally he belongs to the Middle Ages. The softness and corruption of the people disgust him. He feels stifled. But how can he stem the torrent of vice he sees around him? In the last few lines he bids farewell to his hopes in this doleful poem of his youth:

Canzon, fa che sia accorta,
Che a purpureo color tu non te appoggie
Fugi palazzi e loggie,
E fa che tua ragion a pochi dica;
Che a tutto el mondo tu serai nemica.

(Oh my song, take thou care not to lean upon any pomp. Flee all palaces and places of pleasure. Tell thy mind to very few. For know that thou wilt be at enmity with the world.)

. . . . . .

A blind hatred of the world torments him. He longs to flee far away, but knows not where to go. He craves with all his heart to see the triumph of Christ,

His Reign on earth. But he is not yet able to see any path that will lead him on to the field of battle, to the scene of a great victory. . . . There has not yet arisen in his heart a desire for a monastic life, nor has the religious vocation yet appeared to him as a means of attaining his end.

CHAPTER II

Flight from Ferrara

THE well-known portrait of Savonarola[1] by Fra Bartolomeo delle Porta corresponds to the description given of him by many of the ancient historians: "A dark melancholy-looking face and brilliant eyes." Burlamacchi, however, gives us an entirely different description. He writes: "He had a full face, fair ruddy complexion, high furrowed forehead, splendid bright eyes, the colour some call grey-blue; long eyelashes, nose slightly arched, under lip rather thick, a face full of charm, giving us instinctively the sense of a quick brain and strong intellect; not very tall, but well-proportioned, his gestures and movements gentle and kindly, his well-shaped delicate hands so thin that in certain lights they seemed to be transparent, his attitude and general demeanour grave and dignified even to the point of austerity, but modified by a certain humble gentleness, which gave charm and beauty to all his words and actions."

This is a picture of the *young* Savonarola, at the beginning of his career. What a change when, twenty years later, after bitter trials and sorrows he suffers

[1] See illustration.

martyrdom at the early age of forty-six.[2] We see the lines hardened in his thin sunken cheeks; pallor has taken the place of ruddiness; those hands, always thin and delicate, have become more transparent; his charm and beauty are turned into sadness. Clouded is the blue splendour of his eyes, like the sea when tossed by the tempest. No longer do we see the gentle and loving gestures. His spirit is embittered and his pride has turned to disdain, the disdain of a disappointed man who sees only ingratitude and an immense hatred which he has had to endure from the people whom he had so dearly loved. Certain historians and artists have made Savonarola appear to have been just a gruff, surly friar —an unstable moralist. But here they are wrong. They see in the Dominican Friar only a terrible prophet of doom; a preacher who thundered from his pulpit against all the vices of the age, and more especially against the Roman Court, and remembering his famous Burning of the Vanities, accuse him of being an enemy to art and culture. They forget to mention his humility and thirst for righteousness, the personal charm and loving nature which drew to his side men of all classes, high and low, rich and poor, and how he fascinated them, so that not only did they believe in him but remained true to the bitter end. His frequent meditations had induced in him a certain strain of melancholy, and although it is true that he had never

[2] See illustration.

lived the unbridled gay life of the youths of Ferrara, still at the age of twenty he did have dreams of a home, of happiness, love and domestic peace. Living in the next house was a Florentine exile, a member of the noble family of Strozzi. His natural daughter lived with him, a winsome young girl, who pleased Savonarola so greatly that he visited the house frequently in order to be with her, and it was not long before he discovered that the great love he bore her could not be hidden. He believed that she returned this love, and one day, full of confidence, with a charming and simple frankness, he told the maiden how much he loved her. His declaration was received with disdain. The haughty cruel girl gave him to understand that never could a Strozzi marry a Savonarola. He was wounded to the depths of his heart. The "No" of a young girl shattered for ever his dreams of a home and happiness. Had he been older, or a man of different temperament, and more easily pleased, he might have laughed at a refusal which betrayed so much silly pride and vanity, and sooner or later, when his love had cooled, would have married another. But Savonarola in this, his first and only love, had placed so much of himself that the rude awakening was terribly painful. The sweet hopes he had entertained had filled him with happiness. He was still very young, only twenty, his heart full of tenderness, and what he saw and loved he desired to possess. His hoped-for joy, like a crystal which being

once broken can never be pieced together, was shattered and lost for ever. His first love thus rudely repulsed, the sad youth felt that all hopes of earthly happiness had fled. One hope, one source of happiness alone remained, pure and resplendent with Light immortal.

. . . . . .

When at Faenza in 1474 he went to hear a certain Augustine friar, who was preaching a course of sermons, and later he told his friends that there was *one word* in that sermon which so strongly impressed him that throughout his life he could never forget it. It was this mysterious word which determined his future vocation. He accepted it as the Voice of God calling him to Himself. He shut it up in his heart. He never revealed it even to his dearest friends. It was the talisman of his inner life, the motive power of his future apostleship. It strengthened him in the midst of his labours. Perhaps he murmured it to himself as he went to his death!

When Girolamo left Faenza and returned to his father's house he felt much happier, but still perturbed at the news he must soon tell his parents. He had made his decision, which was irrevocable. He must leave the world for the cloister. He grieved above everything to give pain to that dear mother who loved him and would have him always with her. A whole year passed before he could bring himself to tell her that he had decided to take the final step, and during this time he had to fight his natural affection, his love

of home life, of family ties. He dared not speak of these feelings to his parents, and yet all the while the mysterious Voice was impelling, urging, commanding him to hasten, and not place any hindrance in the path of his vocation. After much thought he one day decided that it would be better to leave the house secretly. On the 23rd of April, 1475, the eve of his flight, he took up the lute upon which he had so often played his little love songs when he had dreamed of earthly happiness. The tune which he now played was so full of gloom and sadness that his mother came to him and as if moved by some dark presentiment said: "My dear boy, this sounds like a song of farewell." He made no reply, but went on playing with trembling fingers, not daring to look into his mother's face. His heart was so full of grief that he feared to betray his feelings. The next day, which was the feast of St. George, the city was thronged with people, and in the tumult of rejoicings Savonarola left his father's house and started on his journey to Bologna. On arriving in the city he went to the monastery of the Dominicans, where he asked to see the superior. He then begged to be allowed to enter the Order, even in the most humble capacity, and his request was immediately granted. When alone in the quiet of his cell his first thought was to write to his father a letter in which he reveals the depth of his convictions and his reasons for leaving the world:

"Bologna, *April 25th*, 1475.

"My honoured Father,—I am sure you must be grieving over my departure, and especially because I left without saying anything about it to you. I am, therefore, writing this letter to tell you my reasons, and to show you the state of my mind, so that you may have the comfort of knowing that I have not acted childishly or foolishly as some may believe. First of all I ask you as a virile man, a man of sound common sense, who is guided by truth rather than by passion, to judge reasonably, and to say whether I have done right.

"My first and chief reason is my desire to walk closer with God. In the world I see how the iniquity of man prevails; violation, theft, pride, idolatry, and blasphemy have taken the place of righteous living. Several times a day I repeated with tears, the words: 'Heu fuge crudeles terras, fuge littus avarum.' I feel that I could no longer bear to look upon the great wickedness of the blinded people; I could not look upon virtue extinguished and vice triumphant. I prayed every day to the Lord Jesus Christ that He would lift me out of this mire. I used to utter tiny little prayers saying: 'Notam fac mihi viam in qua ambulem, quia ad te levavi animam meam.' So God in His great mercy, when it seemed good to Him, showed me the way; and I hearkened, although I was so unworthy of such great grace.

"My honoured father, now answer me: Is it not a virtue if a man flees the iniquity and wickedness of this poor world, so that he may live as a rational being, and not as a beast among the swine? And besides, would it not be the basest ingratitude, having prayed to God to show me the right path, to refuse to walk in it when He has deigned to point it out so clearly? Oh, no! My Lord Jesus, rather would I suffer a thousand deaths than show ingratitude towards Thee. So you see, my dearest father, you ought to thank God and not be sorrowful; thank Him that He has given you a son for twenty-two years, and now deigns to make him his knight-militant. Dear father, do you not consider it a great honour to have a son the soldier and knight of Jesus Christ? I know you love me. But I am composed of two parts, body and soul. Which of the two do you love? You cannot say that you love my body, for that would mean loving the vilest part of me. Therefore, you must love my soul, so why not seek its happiness? You ought in truth to rejoice and make a great feast in honour of this triumph. I know, dear father, that the flesh must grieve, but you and all wise broad-minded men should be reasonable, and restrain their feelings. Do you think it was easy for me to leave my home? No, I beseech you to believe me that never since the day of my birth have I had such torment of mind as that I suffered while deciding to leave

my own flesh and blood, to go among entire strangers. It was not easy for me, in order to sacrifice my body for the sake of Jesus Christ, to sell my own will and place it in the hands of persons whom I had never known. But God called me, and He had not disdained to come as a servant to us poor worms. When I thought of His condescension I had to obey. I should never have had the strength and courage for this step, had I not listened to His sweet voice saying: 'Come unto Me, all that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you; take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy, and My burden light.'

"I know, dear father, how sorry you must all feel that I left so secretly, but my grief and sorrow were such that I had to hide them from you, otherwise had I gone to bid you farewell, I should most certainly have hesitated, my heart would have burst with pain, and this might have hindered my departure. So you cannot be surprised that I told you nothing of my plans. I did leave some writings behind the books which are near the window, and these tell you all about my intentions.

"So now, dearest father, I pray you cease weeping, and do not add to the sorrow and distress of my mind, not that I am sorry for what I have done, for if it were to become as powerful as Cæsar, I would never, never return to my former life. But I still feel that I am

just blood and flesh like yourselves, and the senses fight against reason. I am in a continual conflict, and the devil jumps upon me to tempt me. All of this I have to endure in addition to my thoughts for you. Our grief is now fresh, but these sorrowful days will soon pass, and then I hope and trust that our present earthly life may be filled with the comfort of grace, and our next life be one of glory. I have no more to say, except, father, to beg of you as a strong man to comfort my dear mother, whom together with you I crave to bestow upon me your blessing, and I shall always pray fervently for your souls."

In a postscript he recommended to God his brothers and sisters, and especially his brother Albert, who was then careless and indolent. (He later became a monk in the Convent of Santa Maria.)

Girolamo's letter did not have the desired effect. It did not console his father, although he found the "writings behind the books near the window," in which his son's motives for becoming a priest were disclosed. Even if they were read, how could Niccolò Savonarola understand them? The grandfather would have understood. Niccolò's reply to his son is not known, but he seems to have been vexed and angry, for, in a second letter from the monastery, Girolamo writes in a less pious and less affectionate strain. He inveighs against his parents: "Why do you weep, you blind people who have no light? Had an earthly prince called me to

gird on my sword and take my place among his followers, how flattered you would have been! What rejoicings! What feastings! Had I refused the invitation you would have thought me mad. Oh, blind senseless people without a ray of faith! The King of Kings, He who is omnipotent, calls me, yea entreats me—what depths of Love!—with a thousand tears to gird on a sword of finest gold and precious stones and take my place among His own knights. And now because I have not refused, I who am so unworthy—and who would refuse such a call?—you are all against me. It is true, I have accepted and thank God that He condescended to invite me. You should rejoice, and love me even more. But seeing how you act, what can I say and think but that you are my chief enemies, and also enemies of goodness?"

Girolamo is by this time strong and determined in his vocation. He allows nobody to come between him and his God. Whosoever dares to interpose declares himself his enemy.

In the disdainful accents of this young man of twenty-two; in the unexpected and open rebellion he displayed against the will of a father who tried to divert him from his high determination, there can be seen the adamant temperament of a man who would one day challenge the wrath of an Alexander VI.

CHAPTER III

Life in the Monastery

SAVONAROLA chose the Dominican Order because he admired the founder, who had armed Love with a sword. He also feels himself to be a soldier, a soldier of Christ. He acknowledges no other King. It is true that the world despises his King; therefore he despises the world. He longs to make it bend in submission to the sceptre of his Redeemer. It is in this mood of exaltation that he mortifies the body, with haircloth, fastings, vigils. The monastic discipline is rigorous; he endures it with joy. He is ready for every renunciation. No sacrifice is too great. With the passionate ardour of a novice he accepts every command of his superiors. His humility is profound. He revels in it, and craves to give proof of it in his submissive, unquestioning obedience. . . . And all the while he dreams of a future glorious conquest of souls. . . . Poverty he regards as a sweet spouse and he delights in wearing coarse worn-out garments. His shoes are long and patched, the toes upturned. But all he wears is exquisitely clean. Yes, it is true he loves poverty, but only clean decent poverty that is a friend to water. He hated that form of luxury which in his

time had entered into the monasteries together with other corruptions of the age.

One day two Abbots of the Vallombrosa Order called to see him. They wanted his advice and help in a work of reform. While conversing on the matter, Girolamo more than once fixed his gaze on their robes, which were of the most beautiful fine silk, and he smiled. The Abbots, when they saw him smiling, blushed, and wishing to excuse themselves said: "Do not be surprised at our rich silks, for we choose them thus fine because they last longer." With subtle irony Savonarola replied: "What a pity that San Benedetto and San Giovanni Gualberto did not know this secret, for then perhaps they might also have chosen the same material."

We now find that Girolamo, like all novices, spends many hours in the solitude of his cell. Within the bare white walls of his little room there is an atmosphere of the greatest simplicity. The furniture is of the simplest, only bare necessaries. On a rough table stands the Crucifix, and on a reading desk the open Bible, which is continually studied. The margin of each page is black with the notes he has written in the minutest caligraphy. In a corner of the room is the bed, with a sack of straw as mattress, a piece of coarse woollen cloth for a sheet, and another piece to wrap himself in while sleeping. In this cell he prays, reads, meditates and writes. From the little open window can be seen

outlined against the sky the lacy towers of Bologna, like so many swords brandished on high by invisible warriors.

The poet, who never dies in Savonarola, sometimes bursts out into verse. He sees before him the primitive Church, holy and heroic, now robed as a chaste and sorrowful virgin. She shows the wounds which the world has inflicted upon her, and the poet invokes terrible chastisements from Heaven on her enemies, on the haughty, lying Babylon.

. . . . . .

E lei che par che gli ochi mai non tempre
Col viso chino e l'anima pudica,
La man mi prese, et a la sua mendica
Spelonca mi condusse lacrimando;
E quivi disse: Quando
Io vidi a Roma intrar quella superba
Che va tra' fiori e l'erba
Securamente, mi ristrinsi alquanto
Ove io conduco la mia vita in pianto.

(The Virgin Church takes him by the hand and leads him to the place of refuge chosen by her when she saw ambition entering into Rome.)

. . . . . .

Povra va con le membre discoperte
I capei sparsi e rotte le girlande.

. . . . . .

Biastemata da cani
Che van truffando Sabbati e kalende.

(She shows her wounds and recounts the insults she has had to endure.)

. . . . . .

Qual forza ve ha cosi del regno spenta?
Qual arrogante rompe vostra pace?
Rispose sospirando; Una fallace
Superba meretrice, Babilona
Et io: Deh! per Dio, Dona,
Se romper si potria quelle grande ale!
E lei: Lingua mortale
Non po' nè lice, non che mover l'arme
Tu, piangi e taci; e questo meglio parme.

(From a false proud harlot, Babylon—who has disturbed her peace. Oh God. Oh Lady. If only I could break those great wings! The Church replies. Do thou weep and be still, for thus it seemeth best to me.)

A sad, melancholy strain runs throughout the verses which Savonarola writes. He is despondent—a poor friar, shut up in his convent. No fighting for his Master? Must it always be so? Has God no other destiny for him? Must he always weep and be still?

Days, months, years pass by uneventfully in the

strict Monastery of San Domenico. The superiors, struck by the goodness and intelligence of Savonarola, have now made him the Instructor of the Novices. It is a work to which he dedicates himself wholeheartedly, for it gives him his longed-for opportunity of training soldiers for the "Militia of Christ." It was while fulfilling this task that he revealed a gift for oratory and teaching. The superiors see that there is in him the making of a preacher, so they sent him to Ferrara, his native city, to preach the Lenten sermons. This was in 1481, nearly seven years after his secret departure. These years had been devoted to meditation and preparation. His intellect had matured through a course of prodigious, indefatigable study. His will had been strengthened and become as keen as a rapier. He received the order to go to Ferrara with mingled feelings. He rejoiced, and at the same time was perturbed. He is again to see his parents, his friends, his home. But does not God call him to a life of action? Is not this the best way by which he can win souls to Christ? Is he not about to realise the dream of his youth. It cannot be that he is to live and die in the silence of the cloister. Besides, what avails it to heap up knowledge if it is to bear no fruit? One of his mottoes, which sums up his doctrines is:

Tanto sa ciascuno quanto opera.
(As much as one knows, so much one does.)

He returned to Ferrara like an ordinary visitor to find that the city had changed very little in her habits and customs. But the political horizon is fearfully clouded. There are rumours of war in the air, for the Republic of Venice is becoming troublesome. Two groups of Allies have been formed. On one side are the Pope, the Republic of Venice, the Republic of Genoa and several small states in the Marche and Romagna. On the other side are the Duke of Ferrara, the King of Naples, the Duke of Milan, the Marquis of Mantua, Bentivoglio, Lord of Bologna, and the House of Colonna.

When the Venetians threatened to take possession of Ferrara, Pope Sisto IV suddenly withdrew from the League, so that the Republic of Venice now had most of the powers of Italy against her.

The days which preceded the outbreak of war were fraught with anxiety for the Ferrarese. They feared for the independence of their State, they foresaw the ruin of their land by fire and sword, and they had no desire to listen to the young Dominican Friar. In a letter to his mother, a little later, Savonarola complained of the coldness of his fellow citizens, which had grieved him, adding that "a prophet has no honour in his own city." During this short visit he avoided his most intimate friends, and saw his father and mother as seldom as possible, for he was afraid. His natural affections were still too strong, his warm, loving

heart still craved for human sympathy, and having so violently severed all domestic ties seven years before, he feared anything which might tempt him to renew them.

Having completed his first Lenten Mission, he was sent by his superiors to Florence, to the monastery of San Marco. He leaves his native city for ever. Seven years earlier Ferrara was at the height of her glory, and the day of his departure was a Feast day. This time the whirlwind of divine vengeance was preparing to envelop her, and Savonarola's induction to his public ministry took place in the din and turmoil of a cruel war, with its attendant horrors, which fact must certainly have contributed to the formation of a belief in his prophetic mission. He left Ferrara without regret, being comforted by his mother, who bravely and smilingly bade him farewell. He was never to see her again.

Although his pulpit utterances had met with such a cold reception, he did bring away with him from his first mission a cheering omen that his future efforts would be successful. Leaving Ferrara by boat, he was nearing Mantua when he found himself in the midst of a band of soldiers. They were thirteen in number, very rough, abusive fellows, who spent their time gambling and blaspheming. Fired by holy indignation Savonarola remonstrated with them, reproving them sharply for taking God's Name in vain. Then he tells

them how Christ had died even for them, how He had suffered and been crucified for their sakes, and how He wanted them to lead good lives. So touched were eleven of the number, that they fell on their knees, acknowledging their sins and asking for pardon.

This little sheaf of souls was the first fruit of that harvest which Savonarola hoped to reap during his ministry, and it cheered him after the disappointing visit to his native city.

CHAPTER IV

Lorenzo the Magnificent

WHEN Savonarola arrived in Florence, Lorenzo dei Medici [1] was governing the city with the political shrewdness of a thoroughly corrupt man, and with the vain magnificence of a prince of the Renaissance. Like Borso d'Este he had refrained from embroiling himself in any of the wars and turmoils which had devastated most of the other Italian States. He was a most ambitious man, and never hesitated, if necessary, to act in the vilest manner in order to gain his own ends. Although false and intriguing, sometimes even cruel and violent, he possessed a great amount of knowledge and ability. His manners were usually affable and flattering, and his taste was perfect. He was clever enough to be able to conceal his vices, and appear to his subjects as the munificent patron of artists, men of genius and poets, whom he invited to live with him and to sit at the same table. During feasts and carnivals he would mix publicly with the common people, taking part in the processions of the masked mob along the streets, singing the licentious songs which he himself had composed. He joined with gusto

[1] See illustration.

in all the excesses of bands of indecent youths, prostitutes, tavern-keepers, in order to buy for himself a liberal amount of cheap popularity. Having taken part in these orgies and debauches, he would return home and become a different man. He liked to discuss with Marsilio Ficino (the translator of so many works of Plato), the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, or with Benivieni (a fervent believer in Savonarola), the virtues of Divine Love, and he himself would even compose religious prayers and praises. Sometimes he would ask Argiropulus, the Greek philosopher, to explain to him a difficult passage of Aristotle, or he would discuss Latin metres with Poliziano, and poetry with Luca Pulci. Then he would go down to the gardens of San Marco to admire the Greek marble which had lately arrived for his already marvellous collection of antiques, and would often give commissions to the young Michelangelo whom he loved and protected. Here, as in Ferrara, a wave of paganism had spread. Life was soft and filled with pleasure; and in the flowering garland of hills that encircle Florence like a cool and dainty crown, there could be heard echoing in the air the refrain of the Medicean song:

Quant' è bella giovinezza,
Che si fugge tuttavia!
Chi vuol esser lieto, sia:
Di doman non c'è certezza.

(How lovely are the days of youth,
How soon they pass away,
To-morrow's joys are never sure
Then let our life be bright and gay.)

The monastery of San Marco to which Savonarola had been sent was a mediæval foundation. The Medicean, Cosimo il Vecchio, had commissioned the famous architect, Michelozzo Michelozzi, to restore this old convent to the Order of St. Sylvester, and the work of restoration was finished in 1443, costing 36,000 gold florins, which Cosimo paid out of his own pocket. The new and magnificent monastery was given to the reformed Dominicans of the Lombardy Congregation, and was further enriched by the addition to it of the noted collection of the great humanist, Niccolò Niccoli.

During these years it had become a wonderful centre of life, of science and of Christian art. The gentle spirit of St. Antonino, the Father of the Dominican community, had breathed peace and love within its walls. When Antonino was raised to the archiepiscopal throne of Florence, he still continued to live the life of a simple friar. His faithful biographer, Vespasiano da Bisticci, says that this great Dominican who refused the dignity of the Cardinalate from Nicola V, was "so humble and so disdainful of worldly pomp and supremacy that he would not even make use of the arms of nobility pertaining to his office, and would not allow

Alinari

BUST OF SAN ANTONINO, ARCHBISHOP OF FLORENCE, IN THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA NOVELLA, FLORENCE
(ARTIST UNKNOWN)

his Court to show any partiality or the least shadow of simony." His bedroom was as simple as a friar's cell; just a poor little bed, an old wooden chair, and a rough table on which he used to write. He never possessed a book of his own, not even a Breviary, but borrowed day by day whatever he needed from the libraries of San Marco or San Domenico. He established many charitable institutions in Florence, and so great was the veneration felt for him, that when he went along the streets dressed in the worn, shabby robes of a friar, the people would kneel before him. When he died his clothes and household goods were valued at 120 lire (about twenty-five shillings)! He begged that they would bury him at "San Marco, where lie all my hopes and my love."

On the walls of the little cells in San Marco, the natural, simple frescoes of Fra Angelico seem even to this day to perfume the air with the virtues of the holy Archbishop. It was one of these little cells that welcomed Savonarola within its walls, where the chaste beauty of a great Christian art smiled upon him, and where the memory of Antonino still lived, the memory of one who, like Savonarola, had felt the deep need of religious reform in Church and State. Art and daily life were becoming more and more corrupt, the people were turning aside from the pure font of Evangelical Truth, and plunging into the unchecked licence of a life which delighted itself in every form of paganism.

The Florence of the Medici reminded Savonarola of the Ferrara of Borso d'Este, and in all the Courts of Italy, even in that of Rome, where reigned the Supreme Shepherd of Souls, the Vicar of Christ—luxury, sensuality, hypocrisy, false humanism, and cold indifference to every religious principle triumphed.

The philosophers extolled the doctrines of the Greeks and Romans; the poets revived the corrupting verses of Horace, Propertius and Ovid; the artists in their paintings profaned religious scenes, and went so far as to portray in the pictures of the Virgin Mary and of the most venerated saints, the features of notorious courtesans and their own particular mistresses. Savonarola, who felt constrained to admonish the artists, said to them one day: "You robe and ornament the picture of the Virgin Mary as you would that of your courtesan, and give to her the lineaments of your mistress, and your young men go about saying of this woman or of that man, 'This is the Magdalen, that is St. John, here is the Virgin,' and you place the pictures in the churches, thus showing contempt for holy things. You artists, if you only knew as I know what scandal this causes, you would certainly desist. But you place all these vanities in the churches! Do you believe that the Virgin went about dressed as you have painted her? No, I say to you that she went about dressed like a poor woman." Thus with purity of eye and simplicity of mind, in his mystic fervour, Savonarola laid the

spiritual foundations of his long-dreamed-of religious reform, placing his faith in a Christian regeneration of art and science. In one of his sermons on the Psalm *Quam bonus,* he says: "Carnal and corrupt men have their intellect darkened and clouded, for as their whole being is continually absorbed in the pleasures of the senses they are not able to understand intellectual things, and they become enemies of all learning and art." According to Savonarola all great artists ought to obey divine laws, and while striving after the ideal, should make a close study of Nature and display the good taste of simplicity in all their works of art. In thus inculcating æsthetic principles conducing to a high spirituality, he was a strong opponent of the doctrines of the humanists, the fawning imitators of the Ancients, and was in some respects the precursor of a new æstheticism—that of a powerful simplicity. These views he expressed very forcibly in a sermon preached on May the 20th, 1496, in the church of Santa Maria del Fiore. Having said that simplicity was necessary for every good artist, and especially for a Christian artist, and also an essential gift of every good preacher he continued: "Let us examine this simplicity thoroughly, see where it comes from and of what it consists. Of course, when I say simplicity, I mean that inner simplicity which is purity of heart, that enables a man to understand the things of God—and from this inner simplicity is born the outer form. God has bestowed this form of

simplicity on all the things of Nature. If we look at the trees, we see that all the flowers growing on them are natural and simple; we never see trees yielding flowers made up into garlands and wreaths! The tree makes its flowers as it is itself—a simple tree. In the same way, if outwardly a man is natural and simple it shows that he is a man whose heart is natural and pure. When you find that a man speaks with high-sounding words, and an artificial kind of eloquence, as if he were forcing himself to create an effect, you may be sure that he has not this inner simplicity of heart. So when you hear a preacher who speaks a language which is above the heads of his hearers, and full of rhetorical phrases, you soon find out that he is not a simple kind of man, and you get tired of listening to him. No, every true preacher should speak in simple language if he wants to convince his hearers. Look at the Apostles. How simple they were! and yet, what marvellous conversations followed upon their preachings. The reason is that God is better pleased with what comes naturally from a man rather than what comes through force or artifice. What is natural comes direct from God, but the other, although from God, comes to us through the medium of the cleverness of man. Ask the painters which they prefer—a figure or form that is perfectly natural, or one which is forced and unnatural. They will certainly say that they prefer the natural."

Some of Savonarola's enemies accuse him of being "inimical to the art of poetry," having misinterpreted a remark which he made in one of his sermons; and to refute this charge he wrote a little treatise on the division and utility of all the sciences, dedicating it to a certain learned man, Ugolino Verino, who had asked him for an explanation. In it he makes very clear his own views on poetry and at the same time criticises the false poets of the Renaissance. "It has never been in my mind," he says, "to condemn the making of poetry, but only its abuse; although both by words and writings many have tried to calumniate me. I had thought of taking no notice of them; of not answering a fool according to his folly, but now your words urge me to take my pen in hand and write. But please do not expect from me any elegance of style, for it is twenty years since I left my studies of the humanities for matters of greater discipline. Seeing that our soul delights itself in chanting and harmony, it was the habit of the Ancients to put their words into metre, so that they might be more pleasing. But this using of metre is after all only a mere form, for a poet can quite as easily treat his theme without as with metre. Our Lord in Holy Scripture gives us real poetry of wisdom; real eloquence of the Spirit of Truth, not binding us to the outward letter, but, filling our minds with this spirit, carries us right into the inner nature of Truth, where, free from earthly vanities, He nourishes and strength-

ens our minds. What availeth that eloquence which can never arrive at any definite end? Of what use is a ship, painted and decorated though she may be, that is always tossed hither and thither in the midst of the waves and billows, and never carries her men to port, but rather bears them farther away? . . . Those who believe that the art of poetry only teaches dactyls and spondees, long syllables, short syllables, and eloquent words have most certainly fallen into a grave error. . . . There are those who think they can make poetry, but all they do is to copy the Greeks and Romans. They must use the very same forms, the same metres; they invoke the same gods; in fact, they do not know how to use any other names, or any other words except those which the Ancients employed. . . . We are men just as they were—and quite equal to them, and God gives us the same powers, the same privilege to use whatever words we choose to describe things which change from day to day. But these false poets make themselves slaves of the Ancients, insomuch that not only will they not speak against them, but will not even use words which have not already been used by them. This is not only false poetry, but a most pernicious plague which has attacked the youth of the day. I would prove this to you were it not clearer than the sun. Experience, which is the only true judge, has shown so clearly to all of us the immense harm which results from this false method, that it is useless for me to waste time in

condemning it." A man who felt thus nobly and in fact modernly the real nature and supreme end of art was in reality a mystic poet, with a poet's vision, and as will be seen later, an extraordinary inspirer of artists. It is to him that Florence owes the preservation of most valuable books collected by the Medici. After the expulsion of this family, when the library was about to be sold and dispersed, Savonarola, who was then Prior of San Marco, acquired it for his monastery, so that the public might make use of it. On this occasion his love for ancient wisdom was so great that in order to secure for Florence this famous library, he not only spent all the money possessed by the monastery, but even mortgaged its future income for a thousand florins. He did not dissuade the artists from the study of the nude and the contemplation of natural beauty, but desired that their sentiments should be such that they would rise above the creature to the great Creator. In a sermon preached on May 20th, 1496, he says: "God, in order that you may see Him and delight yourself in Him in various ways, has made diverse creatures, each different from the other. Were you always to contemplate the same created thing it might tire you, but you have many different creations of God. You go to a flower and there you see God, then you look at the sky and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all God's creations, and wherever you look you see order, wisdom, and divine goodness."

To the mystic Christians of the Renaissance the universe appeared as a big book whose open pages were strewn with words of dazzling fire, placed there by the Creator, and as every man was made in His image, he ought to be able to read the words aright and so be drawn nearer to the divine.

In the Middle Ages it was considered the highest wisdom to strive to reach Heaven by despising earthly things. But during the Renaissance religious men reversed this absolutely ascetic ideal, and believed that in order to reach Heaven it was necessary to know the world, and to consider it as the sublime work of the Creator.

The religious minds of the Middle Ages had believed in the most austere ascetic isolation, culminating in the fantastic convulsions of the flagellants and various other weird and excessive forms of individual chastisement. But the men of the Renaissance sometimes favoured the opposite tendency, which was that of forgetting the divine in the satisfaction of human passions, and it was against these tendencies that both the humanist Christians and Savonarola waged war.

The Renaissance was a time of great world changes, of travel and discovery. Man's dominion over the world became more extended. Christopher Columbus dared to say "the world is small," and discovered a new continent. The ancient conceptions were proving to be

false. The Ptolemaic system was no longer of use. The sky is filled with worlds full of mystery and movement. The earth which had for centuries been regarded as the immoveable centre of everything now travels through space like the rest of the heavenly bodies. The bewildering sentiment of movement, and of change, began also to invade the minds of men, to modify their conceptions and transform their estimation of things, causing much confusion and many spiritual errors in the religious world.

But there was at the same time an increased mystic aspiration in the minds of the greatest thinkers for a closer knowledge of the Divine Being when they saw His wonders of Creation.

Cardinal Niccolò da Cusa, of German origin, and one of the greatest philosophers and theologians, a saintly and learned man, exclaims: "Man desires to know more and more, he desires to know still more profoundly what he already knows, he desires to love more deeply that which he does love, and the wide world itself does not satisfy him, for his thirst for knowledge can never be quenched."

This heroic faith of the pious Cardinal in the power of human intellect, when enlightened by God, revealed the new spirit of the Renaissance, the spirit which when exaggerated would easily become the blind pride of modern rationalism.

Fra Girolamo, who, as already remarked, had "from

his youth never consented to the opinions and ideas of other people, but had always fixed his gaze on Truth and Reason" felt the rapture of this divine inner liberty which exalted and strengthened him in his own faith.

CHAPTER V

Preaching in the Duomo

FRA GIROLAMO preached for the first time in Florence during Lent, 1482, in the church of San Lorenzo. His congregations were small; scarcely more than twenty-five persons. Everybody was flocking to the Church of Santo Spirito to hear a certain Fra Mariano da Genazzano—a devoted friend of Lorenzo dei Medici and much admired in the circle of courtiers and literary *protégés* of Lorenzo.

Fra Mariano became later the rival and bitterest enemy of Savonarola. Angelo Poliziano gives us a description of this celebrated preacher: "I have never known a man so insinuating and at the same time so prudent. He neither repels with over-severity nor deceives and entices with over-indulgence. So many preachers think themselves to be absolute sovereigns of man's life and death. They abuse their powers. They look on you from head to foot with a frowning stare and they tire you out with their everlasting fault-finding. But Mariano is full of moderation. When in the pulpit he is a strict and severe censor, but once he comes down he expands in such affable conversation that he captivates all his hearers."

Fra Mariano was, in fact, unctuous and moderate. He was a preacher who followed the fashion of the times, cherishing the sentiments and tastes of the humanists.

He gleaned his quotations and elegant phrases in the gardens of the classic writers, and was a perfect *virtuoso*.

In a letter to a friend, Poliziano further eulogises Fra Mariano: "I am all ears when I hear his harmonious voice, his choice language, and elegant phrases. I even notice the way he emphasises his words, I recognise his punctuations, and I am quite carried away by his delightful cadences."

Savonarola's oratory was in direct contrast to this. He spoke, anyhow, words that came straight from his heart, and his voice was stern. The Florentine chronicler Cerretani writes: "Savonarola introduced what might be called a new way of preaching the Word of God; an apostolic way; not dividing his sermons into parts, or embellishing them with high sounding words of elegance, but having as his sole aim the explaining of Scripture, and the return to the simplicity of the primitive Church."

But such preaching as this did not find favour with the Florentines. This unknown Dominican Friar from the North seemed to them a barbarian when compared with the elegant Mariano. One day, moved by his great affection for Savonarola, a certain Benivieni who

was one of the first friends the Friar had made in Florence (and also later on one of his most faithful followers and defenders), determined to speak to him on the matter. He felt jealous for his friend, and disappointed at the apparent want of response to his preachings. He went to Savonarola and said: "Father, it cannot be denied that your doctrine is true, useful, and necessary, but your manner of delivery lacks grace, especially when compared with the eloquence of Fra Mariano." Savonarola brusquely replied: "Elegance of language must give way to the simplicity of the preaching of sound doctrine."

But the superior of San Marco had also noticed the scant enthusiasm shown by Savonarola's hearers, and the lack of fruit which his efforts yielded, so during the Lent of 1484 and of 1485 he sent him to Sangimignano, a lovely mountain village, where Dante two centuries earlier had been sent as ambassador for the Guelph League.

These mountain folk were of Sienese origin, and, therefore, well disposed to listen to the appeal of a truly mystic mind. So it was at Sangimignano that Savonarola showed himself as a prophet sent by God. It was here that his first great war cry was heard. It was to these people that he announced the great event which he had been sent to preach—the event which he prophesied throughout his life, *The Church will be scourged and then regenerated.*

The Pope Sixtus IV died in 1484. It was rumoured that there were grave dissensions among the Cardinals assembled in conclave. There were fears of a schism. Then followed the scandalous election of Innocent VIII. The poet again arose in Savonarola and he offered a prayer in verse, a prayer in which can be seen all the agony of his heart:

Deh! mira cum pietate in che procella
Si trova la tua sposa,
E quanto sangue, oimè, tra noi s'aspetta,
Se la tua man pietosa,
Che di perdonar sempre se diletta,
Non la riduce a quella
Pace, che fu, quand'era poverella.
Converti, Signor mio, queste terrene
Anime nostre al regno,
Dove fia pace a la tua santa sposa;
Per quel pietoso legno
Che in terra e in ciel l'ha fatta gloriosa
A te pietà convene;
Pupilli siamo, e tu sei nostra speme.
Jesù, dolce conforto e sommo bene
D'ogni affannato core,
Risguarda Roma cum perfetto amore.

(Oh Lord, look in pity on the peril in which Thy Spouse finds herself. How much blood, alas!

must be shed if Thy all-pitying Hand, that always delights to extend pardon, be not stretched forth to bring back that peace which Thy Church enjoyed when she was poor.

Oh my Lord, convert our souls. Bring peace to Thy holy Spouse, for the sake of Him who died on the Cross. Thou art our Hope. Oh Jesus, sweet comfort and highest good of every hungry soul, look down with perfect love on the city of Rome.)

During this period Savonarola seems to have lived in a mystic delirium. He felt himself filled with the spirit of the ancient prophets. He hears mysterious voices. Strange and terrible visions flash before him. His imagination conjures up scenes of awe and wonder. He is convinced that he is inspired directly by God. Human wisdom pales and droops in face of the heavenly Truth revealed to him from on high. In a written description of his visions he says: "What I saw in spirit and announced, was to me much more certain than the first principles of the philosophers."

When in the pulpit the hot fire of his eloquence terrified the people. His words penetrated and conquered. The people of Sangimignano were captivated by the holy will of the prophet. Habits and customs changed as if by magic. One may believe that those obscene frescoes in the palace of the Podestà (lately

restored) must then have been decently veiled with a coating of lime! This fiery eloquence—this hot breath of reform—gradually extended its influence to other cities of Italy until it reached pagan Florence, where it started to set alight the greatest spiritual conflagration recorded in the history of the Italian Renaissance.

. . . . . .

During the Lent of 1486 Savonarola was at Brescia where he preached on the Apocalypse. His sermons were mainly directed against the defects and errors of the clergy and the people of Italy. He spoke with ruthless vehemence and predicted that they would be visited with dire chastisements from Heaven. While he was speaking, some of his hearers said that they could see a bright halo surrounding his head. His fame as a preacher spread throughout the whole country. From Brescia he went to Reggio to be present at the Chapter of the Dominicans, when all the eminent ecclesiastics and learned laity met together to discuss questions of theological and philosophical discipline. Among the number assembled was a young man of about twenty-three, already famous for his vast culture and prodigious intelligence. He was a fair young prince, of sober mien and kindly, gentle manners, whose name was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

He was present one day when Savonarola, with a tremendous force of eloquence, inveighed against ecclesiastical corruption. His words provoked an indescrib-

able commotion, and the young Pico was so deeply impressed that he became one of the Friar's most faithful adherents. He bound himself to him in a friendship which was so devoted and tenacious that nothing but death could dissolve it.

Savonarola remained in the North of Italy until the January of 1489, and on the 25th of the month he wrote to his mother a most affectionate letter, in which he shows her his state of mind: "I have opened out my heart to you, dear mother, even more fully than I had intended. You now see that I am more determined than ever to dedicate body and soul and knowledge to God's service and my neighbour's salvation, and since I cannot do this in my own part of the country I must do it elsewhere." It seemed certain—although Ranke denies it—that Giovanni Pico della Mirandola suggested to Lorenzo il Magnifico that he should recall Savonarola to Florence. At any rate, on August the 1st, 1489, Fra Girolamo appeared once more in the pulpit of San Marco. This time the fame of his name having spread like a wave over the country, an immense crowd thronged the church. Pale and stern, the Prophet thundered forth the divine message to the cold Florentines. He illustrated the meaning of the mysterious truths of the Apocalypse, applying them to contemporary events. He himself wrote that on that day he "preached a terrible sermon." His triumph

was complete! The following year the doors of the Duomo were opened to him.

The Duomo or Santa Maria del Fiore had not in the days of Savonarola the gay pretentious marble façade which we now see. This was placed there in the nineteenth century, when modern vanity, in reconstructing the church, also added the anæmic statues and the coats-of-arms of the donors. In the days of the Friar the façade flushed with the bare red bricks of the Trecento as if conferring on it a severe and angry aspect which accorded well with the severity of design found in the interior, so solemnly mystical. It was under the arches of this church that the powerful voice of the Prophet resounded.

In one of the ancient Dominican legends we read: "The people got up at midnight so as to be in time to hear the sermon. They went as far as the Duomo, where they waited patiently in the Piazza until the doors were opened. And nobody complained of cold or air or any other discomfort. Then they would stand on the cold marble pavement even in the winter, young and old, women and children of every condition, with so much jubilation and enjoyment that it made one marvel. They went to the sermons as if going to a wedding. Then in church—how silent it was! Every person went to his place, and with a little light in their hands, those who could read said the Office, while others prayed. And although there were so many hundreds

of people present, not even a whisper could be heard. Then would come in the children singing hymns and praises with such sweetness that Paradise seemed to have been opened. They would thus wait patiently for three or four hours until the Friar entered the pulpit. Then how admirable the attention that was paid to his words—no feeling of tiredness, no longing for him to finish, every eye and every ear on the alert so as not to miss a single word. And when the end came it seemed as if the sermon had only just begun. His words were like keen darts which entering the hearts of his hearers ignited in them a blaze of emotion and faith."

Guicciardini observes that while nobody had ever been able to preach more than two Lenten Missions in Florence without wearying, Savonarola preached many years, continuing to be more and more esteemed by the people.

"What was said by Savonarola," says Vaglienti, "was received by his followers as gospel; many believed more in him than if St. Paul had spoken to them." Many of his sermons were taken down word by word, and his faithful reporter often writes a note such as: "Here I burst into tears and could not write further." So great was the force of the power he had to excite the deepest feelings of the people, to touch the most sensitive chords, and cause them to vibrate!

The chief theme of his sermons was the purifying

and renewing of the Church, and the reconstruction of the whole of Society, which had fallen into a frightful state of corruption. On the eve of the second Sunday in Lent, 1491, he had some idea of destroying the sermon which he had prepared, as it seemed to him too bitter, but while he was thinking about it, all at once, at daybreak, he heard a voice crying out: "Thou fool, dost thou not see that it is the Will of God that thou shouldst announce these things?" . . . The faith he had in direct divine inspiration took still deeper root in his mind.

While possessed by this spirit of prophecy he predicted the imminent death of Innocent VIII, of Lorenzo dei Medici, and of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who was not only quite young but also in excellent health. All these predictions were fulfilled. Then he announced the expedition of Charles VIII into Italy; the change in the State of Florence, and so many other events, that, as Landucci says in his diary: "Fra Girolamo was believed by everybody to be a prophet and a holy man."

Meanwhile his enemies were noting everything and trying to poison the minds of people against him. Benivieni says they accused him of "being in the secrets of the nobles and highly placed citizens," while others suggested that he was "pretending to prophesy while really only following certain prophecies already written." And yet there were no doubts about the fulfill-

ment of many of his predictions. Pastor tries to represent Savonarola as being "deluded by hallucinations, although in good faith," and this illustrious historian also affirms that "since the time of Christ there have not been any prophets," but as Schnitzler remarks, this does not correspond with the truth. The Church also acknowledges that many saints have had the gift of prophecy and of revelation. Catherine of Siena, Hildegarde, Joan of Arc, St. Brigida, are all instances of persons acknowledged by the Church as possessing this gift. Also the great divines, like San Tommaso, recognise the possibility of certain prophetic revelations subsequent to Bible days. Nor on the other hand is it possible even in the light of modern science to accuse persons of being weak-minded if they affirm to have had extraordinary warnings and presentiments, when we find among them such men as Socrates, Mahomet, Napoleon, Pascal, and nearly all the mystics.

Savonarola in his ascetic masterpiece, *The Triumph of the Cross,* shows himself to be possessed of admirable mental equilibrium. In the preface he writes: "And as we desire in this volume to discuss matters with reason we must begin by means of things which we see in order to arrive at the knowledge of the unseen, since all our knowledge begins with the senses, and they recognise only corporal attributes. But our intellect, owing to its subtlety penetrates into the substance of natural things, from the consideration of

which it attains to the knowledge of the unseen." Is not this the language of a modern scientist?

The Savonarolian mysticism does not obscure Reason. When the mystic rises into the mysterious regions of the divine, the Heavens are opened out to him and he hears the voice of Eternal Truth, and sees things which are hidden from the eyes of those who live only for the world, but when he returns to earth he quickly re-acquires the control of his natural reason and becomes a simple man among men. His acts and his words are always influenced by the spirit of Truth. He never departs from the infallible guide of an honest Christian conscience, and he hates every mystification.

In his *Compendium of Philosophy, of Ethics and of Logic*, Savonarola explains what he understands by the spirit of Truth: "By veracity we mean a certain habit, according to which man shows himself both by words and deeds as he really is, and rather lesser than greater. . . . This is a moral rather than a legal duty, insomuch as it is certainly a debt of honesty which every man owes to his brother man, and the manifestation of Truth is always a part of Justice."

These words reveal the true character of Savonarola.

CHAPTER VI

Prior of San Marco

DURING the Lent of 1491, Savonarola preached in the Duomo to immense crowds, whose enthusiasm was so great that from henceforth he must be considered as the spiritual head of the Republic. His authority, and above all the violence of his language, and his denunciations of the bad customs and tyrannical pride of the princes of this world, caused much annoyance and suspicion to Lorenzo dei Medici and his followers, and it was decided to send five illustrious citizens to try and persuade him to moderate his language, at the same time giving him to understand that should he refuse and persist in this his dangerous behaviour, he ran the risk of being exiled from Florence. The five illustrious citizens arrived, and delivered their message—Savonarola replied—"Go, tell Lorenzo dei Medici that although he is a Florentine and the first in the city, and I am only a stranger and a poor friar—yet he will depart, but I shall remain."

Savonarola was elected Prior of San Marco in July of 1491, and on this occasion also he refused to submit to Lorenzo.

As we have seen, the monastery had been founded

and enriched by the Medici, and it had been the custom for each new Prior on assuming office to pay a visit to the head of the Medici family, thus paying an act of homage to him. Savonarola, however, absolutely refused, saying: "I consider that I owe my election to God alone, and to Him will I vow obedience." This reply to Lorenzo must not be looked upon as any want of courtesy, or any personal rancour against Lorenzo, but simply an assertion by Savonarola of his independence as priest, and as head of a religious congregation which was free from all political authority. The saintly Archbishop St. Antonino, under similar circumstances, had replied in the same terms to Cosimo dei Medici. Da Bisticci further relates that one day Cosimo went to the holy Archbishop to beg of him a certain service, but St. Antonino replied: "There was no need for Cosimo to pray him to render any service which justice owed him, for it would be done for him, just as it would for the very humblest man in Florence who had right on his side." The princes of the Renaissance were not accustomed to such language, but Cosimo remained silent before the saintly Antonino, just as Lorenzo, who was a prudent man, refrained from coming to any open quarrel with Savonarola. He tried instead to win him with flattery and kindnesses, and to bend him to his will by sending rich gifts to his convent. But Fra Girolamo was not to be beguiled by the sweet and tempting baits of the Medicean. One day,

alluding to Lorenzo in a sermon, he remarked that "the faithful dog never stops his barking while defending his master's house, and even if a thief comes, and while trying to deceive the guardian throws him a bone, the dog puts it on one side and does not cease to bark and to bite the thief."

Lorenzo, now finding that neither flattery nor kindness could win Savonarola to his side, determined to try another way, which he hoped would destroy the growing authority and influence of the Prior over the Florentines.

He had built a very beautiful monastery outside the Porta San Gallo for the celebrated Fra Mariano, whom he had also befriended in various ways, making the preacher his debtor, and now the opportunity had come to make good use of him. Inviting Mariano to the palace he begged of him to prepare a sermon which would demonstrate "the folly and presumption of a man who excited the people, causing divisions and discord through preaching and prophesying future events." Fra Mariano, who had always hated Savonarola, was only too willing to help to bring him into disrepute, so on Ascension Day, 1491, he preached in his own Church of San Gallo on the text, *Non est vestrum nosse tempora vel momenta* (Acts i. 7). (It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.)

The Augustine spoke with such passion and bitterness that he defeated his own purpose, for his attack

was so virulent and showed so clearly that his object was to overthrow Savonarola, that the people began to dispute and argue, and Fra Mariano not only failed in weakening the Prophet's reputation, but many illustrious personages who were present—among them Pico della Mirandola—although devoted to the Medici, —were drawn to Savonarola's side and became his faithful followers. The following Sunday, Savonarola, who knew of Fra Mariano's attack and that he had been instigated by Lorenzo, chose exactly the same text for his sermon, but interpreting it according to his own doctrines, completely refuted the arguments of his rival and reduced him to silence.

Henceforth Fra Mariano nourished in his heart a feeling of hatred and vengeance against Savonarola.

Having been elected Prior of San Marco, Savonarola now earnestly desired to reform the discipline of the Dominican Community, into which had crept many of the corrupt habits of the time.

He started by giving to his companions a description of those Christian principles which he himself rigidly professed and which he desired them to observe. "You Christians should always have the Gospel with you, I do not mean the book, but the spirit, for if you do not possess the spirit of grace and yet carry with you the whole book, of what advantage is it to you? And again, all the more foolish are they who carry round their necks Breviaries, notes, tracts and writings, until

they look like pedlars going to a fair. Charity does not consist in the writing of papers. The true books of Christ are the Apostles and saints, and true reading consists in imitating their lives. But in these days men are like books made by the Devil. They speak against pride and ambition and yet they are immersed in them up to their eyes. They preach chastity and maintain concubines. They enjoin fasting and partake of splendid feasts. . . . Such are useless books, false books, bad books, books of the Devil, in which he writes all his malice and wickedness. . . . Only look to-day at the prelates. They are tied to earthly vanities. They love them. The cure of souls is no longer their chief concern. So long as they receive their emoluments they are quite satisfied. . . . In the Primitive Church the chalices were made of wood and the prelates of gold—to-day—chalices of gold, prelates of wood!"

. . . . . .

Visitors to Florence when they go to St. Mark's are shown the humble rooms occupied by Savonarola. Two plain little cells, one for study, one for sleep, a little round window, a few relics of the martyr: his rosary, his cloak, his haircloth, his cassock, and the post to which he was bound on the day of his martyrdom. The pathetic objects, appearing terribly real in that narrow space which once witnessed the storms and tempests of the most secret thoughts, the burning desires, the heavenly visions, the torturing anxieties of a grand soul,

áll speak to us of Savonarola. In these cells can be felt the ardour of a Christian soul that once dreamed of the restoration of the Primitive Church, and who one day sent up to Heaven this humble prayer:

Omnipotente Iddio,
Tu sai quel che bisogna al mio lavoro,
E qual è il mio desio:
Io non ti chiedo scettro nè tesoro,
Come quel cieco avaro;
Nè che città o castel per me si strua
Ma sol, Signor mio caro,
Vulnera cor meum charitate tua.

(Omnipotent God, Thou knowest what I need and desire for my work. I ask neither sceptre nor treasure like a blind miser. Nor do I ask for castle or city. But only my dear Lord, that Thou shouldest pierce and fill my heart with Thy Love.)

This is the man who appeared to many as haughty, rebellious, politically ambitious! The only thing he asks of God is Love. It was his lot to be dragged into the vortex of strife, to be mixed up in party hatreds, to be looked upon as the legislator of Florence, embroiled in its political intrigues and in the disputes of the Papacy with France. But during all this time in the secret recesses of his soul he yearned for the peace

Alinari

THE CELL OF GIROLAMO SAVONAROLA, SAN MARCO, FLORENCE

of the cloister. The real tragedy of the life of Savonarola sprang from the fact that he was influenced by two totally diverse motives. He had all the aspiration of a mystic for a life of solitude and communion with God, and at the same time was impelled to a life of action in the midst of a busy world. And yet the tumult of citizen life, the din of fame, the glories of the pulpit, the triumphs of popularity were never able to allure the mystic poet that always dwelt in Savonarola. His own choice would have been to live in the peace of his monastery, in the perfect joy which he experienced in a life of meditation. He did not crave for publicity, but felt that he was called by God, and that urgently, to come out of the desert, as did the prophets of Israel to defend the independence of God's chosen people. For to Savonarola the Italians of the Renaissance were in truth a chosen people. Writing of Florence he says: "She stands in the midst of our country as the heart lies in the body of man (Florentia veluti cor in homine, in medio Italiæ sita)." He loved Florence much more than he loved his native city, Ferrara. And yet, alas! it was his beloved Florence that killed her prophet!

Savonarola dreamed of creating a tranquil refuge to which he could resort, far away from the bustle and strife of the city, and where he could carry out his ideals of a real spiritual brotherhood. The vast San Marco did not please him too well. It contained so many

superfluous things, besides being in the centre of all the movement of the city. Lorenzo had a superb villa at Careggi, where he entertained literary men and humanists, renewing with them the cult of the philosophers and pagan poets, and spending days and nights in pageantry and pleasures. Above this was a piece of land called Monte Cane, and on it Savonarola planned to build his monastery, which was to be a model of the simple Christian life. Burlamacchi says of it: "He would not use marble or any other stone of value; nor would he have the structure very high above the ground; the little cells were to be separated from each other by partitions made of twisted cane, or posts; windows and doors to have no iron fastenings, everything to be made of wood. Church and cloisters to be of the simplest. Columns not of stones, but of bricks and wood. Inside the church there must be no vain useless figures, but simple devotional objects. Sacerdotal vestments of wool or linen. Chalices with no unnecessary ornamentations. Everything should exhale the odour of simplicity, sanctity, and devotion. Only one bell, and that not a big one." Burlamacchi adds: "I happened to be present one day while Savonarola was reading, and he turned to me and told me this his desire, and I well remember him saying: 'When my monastery is built there will come to the door other friars who will ask to speak to such and such an inmate, and the porter will ask "Are you simple people?

If you are, then you may enter, but if not, you must go away, for here none but the humble-minded may enter." ' And I remember that I, who was then only a youth, said to myself, 'When this monastery is finished, then will I also become a priest and servant of Christ, but not now in these days of lukewarmness.' "

In this model monastery Savonarola also intended to receive converts who would dedicate themselves to the pursuit of the liberal Arts; of sculpture, painting, the writing of books, contributing all that they earned to the needs of the convent itself, so that the friars would be free to give themselves over more zealously to the preaching of the Gospel, without any fear. Were they constrained to ask for alms, it might be that they would lack courage to speak out the truth. The converts were to be recruited from noble families on condition that they would show themselves "prudent, benign, exemplary, of good, kind behaviour, respectful and courteous to the other servants of God." According to this conception of an ideal convent it was proposed by him to institute three Orders of Lecturers:

The first composed of those able to deal with matters of conscience,

The second, of men versed in the Holy Scriptures,

The third, of keen scholarly theologians.

For the first two Orders he would nominate as lecturers men of mediocre ability, in order to demonstrate that it was possible to deal with matters of conscience,

and to preach Christ without a knowledge of Aristotle or the profane authors.

Then there was to be a limited number of students of exceptional abilities, chosen from the others to be set aside to preach the Word of God. They were to have no other office, to be exempt from the choir, from confessions, and especially from any hope of dignities.

Unfortunately this most beautiful plan of a model convent had to be abandoned, although Savonarola had already prepared the sum of money necessary for cutting down a wood of chestnut trees for building material. All the young friars were prepared to go with their master, but "the lukewarm old friars," says a historian, "who lacked the fervour of the young, began to criticise the idea, saying that it would be a scourge and trial, even to the poor friars, and much worse for the young converts. They even went so far as to visit the relatives of those interested to influence them against the plan and to persuade those who had promised to help in the building not to do so, and they said to all that the scheme was irrational, indiscreet, and should by no means be encouraged, and so nothing further could be done in the matter."

Savonarola, not wishing to disturb the timorous consciences of his elderly companions of San Marco, who could not understand the beauty of this ideal—an ideal worthy of a mystic and a poet—was obliged to aban-

don his desire. Guided by a spirit of perfect evangelical charity he was ready to sacrifice himself at all times when it was not a question of *religious principles. Then he was inflexible.*

This man who could make princes and popes tremble was, among his own companions in the intimacy of his monastery, so full of gentleness and meekness that he would join in their childish little games and recreations with the greatest pleasure. The great love and sympathy which Filippo Neri, another great Church reformer, felt for Savonarola, can well be understood, for they had many attributes in common. Fra Girolamo, like San Filippo, often took his younger disciples for country walks, and drawing them into a shady place would speak to them of holy things or discuss passages of Scripture. At other times he would tell them to sing praises and even invite them to dance with joy. One day passing under a fig tree he collected some of the branches which were lying on the ground, and scooping out the pith, carved several little doves which he gave to his disciples, explaining to them the mystery of the Third Person in the Trinity. Like San Filippo Neri he loved young people, especially children, and later we shall see the part taken by the Florentine children in the vast political-religious movement set on foot by Savonarola. One day entering the dormitory he noticed a very young novice, scarcely more than a child, trying to don his newly received

Dominican robe, and seeing his clumsy efforts, he went up to help him, remarking jocularly "Did I not tell thee when thou didst receive the habit, that thou shouldest have brought thy nurse with thee?" Sometimes the friars would see children caricaturing their master's gestures, and mocking him. This would annoy them greatly, and they would complain about it to him, but he would treat it as a joke and say "Let them do it, what does it matter?"

Modern historians have not recounted these little traits which are recorded in the Dominican legends. And yet they are quite useful, for it is these little intimate touches, the little touches which are not apparent in the pulpit or on a political stage, that very often help us to read into a man's heart even more than do his great actions. Savonarola so feared to become vainglorious that he was always glad to leave his pulpit, fearing that the enthusiasm with which his sermons were received might make him proud, and to curb any such tendency he carried about with him a small ivory skull upon which he would frequently gaze attentively. He was accused of pride, while in reality, like all great Christians, he was filled with humility. Even during his novitiate he had asked to be allotted the lowest office in the convent at Bologna, and during the periodical cleaning at San Marco when he was its Prior, when he assigned to each monk his duty he always reserved to himself the most disagreeable and onerous

tasks. Although highest in dignity he showed his companions that he was in every way their servant.

He was very sparing in his diet, and only slept for four hours. With marvellous zeal he consecrated all his time to preaching, to studying the Bible, to writing spiritual treatises, to works of charity, to prayer, to the cure of souls, to the duties of his office and later on, to grave political business.

To all he gave an example of a perfect Christian life. Burlamacchi says: "Only to look at his face comforted the soul."

His words were a faithful mirror of his works.

CHAPTER VII

Roderigo Borgia Elected Pope

SAVONAROLA had predicted the imminent death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and at the beginning of April, 1490, Lorenzo, who was then in his villa at Careggi, was taken dangerously ill. The news spread to Florence, casting a gloom over the gay city; and the words "Lorenzo il Magnifico is dying" were heard everywhere with consternation.

Relatives, friends, courtiers, all hurry to Careggi. They walk about the grounds of the villa, they go in and out of the splendid rooms that are filled with statues, pictures, bronzes, and precious stuffs of immense value. Their anxiety is such that they clamour for news of the illustrious patient from the two great physicians, Pier Leone da Spoleto and Lazzaro da Pavia, who have brought to the help of the dying man all the medical science of the day. Angelo Poliziano, who never leaves the bedside, declares that the great Lazzaro should have been called in earlier, and the physician, recognising the gravity of the illness, decides to try his most precious remedy. He dissolves in a potion pearls and gems of highest value, which he then administered to his august patient. But all is in vain,

and Lorenzo himself feels that death inexorably approaches, and calling to his side his son Piero, says to him: "You will, of course, enjoy the same authority in the State as I have hitherto done, but, as the Republic, although forming one body, is at the same time made up of many different persons, never deceive yourself into a belief that you can direct it so as to gain the approval of all. Remember, however, under every circumstance to follow a course of strict integrity, and to consult the interests of the whole community rather than merely one part of it."

Having delivered this wise counsel to his son, he desired to bid farewell to his dearest friends, and especially Pico della Mirandola, of whom he was particularly fond. . . . He then bethought him of his soul, and knowing Savonarola to be a man of the highest integrity, sent to San Marco to ask the Prior to come to Careggi to hear his confession.

Burlamacchi received from Fra Silvestro Maruffi, who was Savonarola's intimate friend, a vivid description of this interview: "Savonarola on entering the sick chamber saluted Lorenzo with due ceremony, and after a short conversation, the patient said: 'Father, I wish to make my confession, but there are three sins on my conscience which keep me back, and they so weigh upon my mind that I am in despair.' The Prior asked: 'And what are these sins?' Lorenzo replied: 'The three sins are so great that I fear God will not

pardon me. The first is the sack of Volterra, during which many outrages were committed and many young maidens grossly ill-treated. The second sin is the robbery of the Monte delle Fanciulle, which caused many maidens to lose their dowries, through which they were driven into a life of shame. The third sin I have on my conscience is the reprisals that followed the Pazzi conspiracy, when so many innocent people died.' The Prior responded: 'Lorenzo, despair not. God is merciful and will show mercy to thee if thou wilt do three things which I shall now tell thee.' 'What are the three things?' asked Lorenzo. Savonarola replied: 'The first is, thou must have a great and living faith that God can and will pardon thee.' Lorenzo replied: 'This I do believe.' Savonarola continued: 'Secondly, thou must restore all thy ill-gotten gains, so far as is possible, leaving to thy children only sufficient wealth to maintain them as decent private citizens.' At these words Lorenzo seemed to be beside himself with astonishment, but after a while he replied: 'And this also I am prepared to do.' Then the Father said: 'The third thing is this—thou must restore to Florence her liberty, and her condition as a republic.' At these words Lorenzo turned his back on Savonarola and refused to answer him a word. So the Prior went out of the room, leaving Lorenzo without absolution, for not long after he expired, and passed into the other world."

Alinari

PORTRAITS OF LORENZO IL MAGNIFICO AND THREE PERSONAGES OF THE SASSETTI FAMILY IN CHURCH OF SANTA TRINITA, FLORENCE (DOMENICO GHIRLANDAIO)

Poliziano, in his description of the death-bed scene, says that Lorenzo died as a Christian with stoical fortitude. When asked if he "liked the taste of a little food" which was given him, he replied: "Just as a dying man might be expected to like it." And "as he became weaker and weaker he took a richly ornamented Crucifix into his hands and kissed it, and peacefully expired." This account given by Lorenzo's devoted friend may or may not be correct, for the historian is not in a position to state with any certainty whether Lorenzo dei Medici died with serene stoicism, embracing the Saviour of the world and at the same time a precious work of art—or whether he died torn with remorse and without absolution.

This historic scene was made the subject of much controversy after the death of Savonarola when the Palleschi [1] on the one hand, and the Piagnoni [2] on the other, described it according to their own regard for Lorenzo and the Friar.

The death of Lorenzo was considered throughout the whole of Italy as one of the greatest national calamities, for there was lost to them a man who had been prudent and moderate in Italian politics. When King Ferdinand of Naples heard of it he exclaimed: "This man has lived enough for glory, but too little for Italy." There was hardly a prince who had not gone for advice to

[1] Partisans of the House of Medici.
[2] Derisive name given to followers of Savonarola (those who weep).

Lorenzo when confronted with any important decision. His prestige was enormous. Even Pope Innocent VIII on the only occasion when he drew up a list of the names of proposed cardinals submitted it to Lorenzo before announcing them to the Consistory. And "il Magnifico" returned him the list after having placed a sign against the names of those who were to his liking, adding when returning the list: "If he would console him, would he think of him also?" The Pope consoled him immediately by adding to the list of cardinals the name of Lorenzo's son, Giovanni, although he was only a lad of thirteen.

A heavy political burden now fell into the hands of Piero dei Medici, a vain, weak and violent man. Guicciardini tells us that Lorenzo was well aware of his son's true character, and had "often lamented with his most intimate friends that the imprudence and arrogance of the son would bring about the ruin of his House." This fear seems to have caused great torment to Lorenzo during his life, and also after his death, if we are to believe an extraordinary story which Michelangelo Buonarroti recounted. The great sculptor was very friendly with a certain Cardiere, an extempore poet and musician who was a frequent visitor to the house of Lorenzo, whom he entertained during the evenings with his lute. This Cardiere told Michelangelo that one day shortly after Lorenzo's death he appeared to him robed in an old shabby black mantle that enveloped

Pinturicchio

POPE ALEXANDER VI IN THE LUNETTE OF THE RESURRECTION
IN THE VATICAN PALACE, BORGIAN ROOMS, ROME

his naked limbs, and bade him go to Piero dei Medici and tell him that very soon he would be exiled from Florence! . . .

The death of Lorenzo was followed by that of the Pope Innocent VIII in July of the same year. He was succeeded by Roderigo Borgia who assumed the title of Alexander VI. He had been created Cardinal when only twenty-five years old. During his youth his intimacy with the lovely Vannozza de Catanei was notorious, and she was the mother of his four children, Cesare, Giovanni, Jofrè and Lucrezia.

Various historians have left us descriptions of Roderigo. One speaks of him as being "handsome, of pleasing appearance, gay, an eloquent attractive speaker." Other descriptions are "he was tall, had black eyes and large mouth; he had splendid health; was inured to fatigue, and extraordinarily eloquent." . . . "His half-closed eyes were full of life, his speech most affable, and he was wonderfully clever in matters of finance." . . . "A man of great ability, and although possessing only a fair amount of literary knowledge, his style was excellent." . . . "A wise man and of truly wonderful keenness in matters of business."

As Cardinal he had possessed a most wonderful palace in Rome, situated halfway between the Campo di Fiori and Castel Sant Angelo. He had built it himself and furnished it with great splendour. In a letter written by Cardinal Ascanio Sforza to his brother Ludovico il

Moro, we are introduced to the intimacy of an apartment which saw the most sumptuous banquets and feasts of the Renaissance. "The house is superbly appointed, the walls being covered with valuable tapestries, describing historical scenes. Some of the beds are upholstered in scarlet satin, others in Alexandrian velvet, and there are coverings of brocade embroidered in gold. There are sideboards loaded with vessels of gold and silver. The carpets are marvellously lovely. The tables and chairs are covered with richest velvets and are beautifully carved."

This was the home of Cardinal Borgia. He was elected Pope during the night of August 10, 1492. Both ancient and modern historians agree that it was by means of incredible simony that he obtained this, the highest position in the Church. But his election was recognised as valid, and there was no one who could deny his undoubtedly eminent suitability for the dignity of a *secular* prince.

He was a Prince of the Italian "Renaissance," and it was the spirit of the age which placed him on the papal throne. Pastor remarks: "The ancient Church would not even have admitted him to the very lowest ranks of the clergy."

The feasts and pageants which accompanied his coronation were as splendid as those of a Roman emperor. When he went to take possession of the Lateran Basilica the streets of Rome were strewn with flowers,

from windows and loggias precious stuffs and wonderful tapestries were displayed, and on the triumphal arches were written flattering inscriptions that were frankly pagan in sentiment. One composed by a poetic courtier read thus:

> CÆSARE MAGNA FUIT, NUNC ROMA EST MAXIMA. SEXTUS REGNAT ALEXANDER; ILLE VIR, ISTE DEUS.

(Great was Rome in the time of Cæsar, to-day still greater, for Alexander VI reigns. Cæsar was a man; Alexander is a god.

It can easily be believed how scandalised the religious men must have been, and how shocked the Christians were at such language. The pious Roman notary, Latino de Masiis, breaks forth into the lament: "Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, it is because of our sins that Thy Vicar on earth has been chosen under such an unworthy form." Unworthy was the election, and unworthy the man who held the high apostolic dignity.

CHAPTER VIII

Arrival of the French

DURING the year 1492 Savonarola had two visions which he recognised as revelations from heaven. One night during Advent he saw in a dream the heavens opening, and a hand appeared, bearing a sword upon which were inscribed the words: "Gladius Domini super terram cito et velociter." The sword was suddenly turned towards the earth, and, accompanied by a storm of thunder and lightning, fell among the people, spreading all the desolation of war, famine, and pestilence.

The next vision he saw on Good Friday. In the sky were two Crosses; one, over Rome, was black and terrible, and bore the inscription "Crux iræ Dei," while that which stood over Jerusalem, splendid and glorious, bore the writing: "Crux misericordiæ Dei." These visions and the prophecies uttered by the Friar began to alarm Piero dei Medici, and he determined to keep him away from Florence as much as possible. He succeeded in having him sent to Bologna for the Lenten services of 1493, and here, as in Florence, the people, both the faithful and the curious, crowded into the church to hear him. Among the latter was the disso-

lute wife of Bentivoglio. She always arrived late, dressed in the height of fashion, loaded with jewels—beautiful and impertinent, followed by a long train of ladies, pages, and cavaliers.

Savonarola could not tolerate the presence of this dissolute woman, and one morning, when, as usual she entered the church, followed by her retinue, the preacher, who was absorbed in the solemnity of his message, stopped all at once, and cried out: "See how the Devil comes to interrupt the Word of God." The turmoil which followed can be well imagined. The Bentivoglio woman, furious, turned to two of her cavaliers, and ordered them to strike the Friar dead in the pulpit. Not having the courage to obey her command, they all left the church in a body. A little later she sent two assassins to the convent to carry out her order to kill Savonarola, but when they found themselves in the presence of the man of God, they not only felt unable to fulfil her behests, but even humbled themselves before him. Savonarola still continued to preach in the same church—and during the last Lenten sermon, knowing well that the wicked woman had not given up her hopes of killing him, he said: "This evening I shall take the road on my return journey to Florence. I shall take with me my little staff and my wooden flask. I shall lodge at Pianoro. Should anybody wish to speak to me, let him come before I leave. But be it known to you, however, that my death will

not take place in Bologna." He returned on foot to Florence, as was his custom, and while still some distance from the city, thinking of the future, which seemed full of gloom, his heart was very heavy, when suddenly there appeared before him a mysterious personage, who quickly vanished after saying: "Remember to do that for which thou hast been sent by God."

Arriving in Florence, the first task which he undertook was to try to negotiate with the Pope for the separation of the monastery of San Marco from the Congregation of Lombardy, for this would give to San Marco an independence and freedom which would prove useful to Savonarola's future work. But Piero dei Medici's consent had also to be obtained, and that without exciting his suspicions, so that the negotiations had to be undertaken very carefully. Both the Brief and the consent being eventually obtained, and having been re-elected Prior, Savonarola started forthwith on the disciplinary reform of the monastery.

He re-established the Rule of Poverty according to the primitive laws of St. Dominic, and was also able to put into effect some of the designs he had in view for his ideal monastery. He started schools for architecture, painting, sculpture, miniature painting, literature and foreign languages, especially oriental languages. These schools were intended for the lay brethren and for the monks who were not preachers, and were to be self-supporting, so that there might be

no begging for alms. The school for the study of oriental languages was intended for those of the monks whom he thought of sending to the East to preach the Gospel to the Turks.

During the Advent season of 1494 Savonarola resumed his preaching in the Duomo. In twenty-five sermons he pointed out the essential points of the Christian doctrine. He attacked with violence the wicked habits of the bad prelates, and the misgovernment of the Italian princes, and he also predicted the speedy downfall of the Medicean tyranny.

In the preceding chapter we have seen how he described the corrupt lives of the prelates, and this is what he says of the princes: "Their palaces and courts are the refuge of all the beasts and monsters of the earth; shelters for malefactors and licentious men, who flock there because they find opportunity and encouragement to satisfy all their unbridled desires, all their evil passions. It is in these palaces that you find wicked counsellors who continually devise new burdens and taxes, which drain the blood of the people. It is here you see the flattering poets and philosophers, who, with a thousand lies and fables trace back the genealogy of these wicked princes to remote times—yea, even to the gods! But worse than all, there are priests who follow exactly the same custom. Oh my brethren, this is the city of Babylon, the city of fools and wicked men. It is the city that God will destroy."

To vindicate the liberty of the citizens, the rights of the people, whom he likens to a big whale, he inveighs against the ruling powers.

"What generation of men is this? What is their aim I wonder? They want to build a city on the whale's back. What do ye? I say. You overburden the beast. He will be suffocated. And still they continue to labour and dispute. They build their fortifications. They quarrel. One party wants to subjugate the other, and so they continue, until there appears at last a tyrant who oppresses them all. He drives his enemy to death. His spies are everywhere, and then come new wars and more dissensions. The whale, now tired of the tumult, moves his huge body. He makes a plunge. Everybody is drowned and the city of Babylon is destroyed."

This is the language of a modern socialist, but couched in the impassioned words of a Hebrew prophet! And this image of ancient Babylon, this cursing of sin, and the preaching of a divine vengeance obsessed Savonarola.

In the autumn of 1494, resuming his exposition of the Book of Genesis, he preached a course of sermons entitled "Sopra l'Arca di Noe." In the Ark he sees a symbolic ship, wherein all faithful Christians should take refuge before the great Deluge overwhelms the earth, destroying the wicked. "The doors of the Ark are still open," he says, "but not for long. The time

is coming, and that soon, when the Ark will be shut, and many will vainly try to enter."

. . . . . .

It must be admitted that many of Savonarola's predictions were fulfilled, but there were not, as at present, daily papers to record them. Political events were only known to a few, and news reached the general public after much delay, when there had been time to add, and change, and so twist the meaning that when it did reach the ears of the people, they were filled with dismay, as if something dark and mysterious had taken place.

Piero dei Medici had at this time such close secret relations with the King of Naples and with the Pope that Ludovico the Moor, Duke of Milan, became suspicious of his intentions, and in order to thwart any schemes there might be hatching he urged the ambitious young King of France, Charles VIII, to come to Italy. Meanwhile, Savonarola had announced boldly from the pulpit the imminent arrival of a new Cyrus. On August the 22nd Charles, with a strong army, crossed the Alps, and at the same time a furious torrent burst over the lovely Italian plains. The French troops under the Duke of Orleans landed at Rapallo, where his savage Swiss sacked the town, and although the Neapolitan garrison had surrendered, he put them and all the inhabitants to the sword, not sparing even the sick and wounded who were lying in the hospitals.

The French marched down through Liguria along the banks of the Magra, putting to fire and sword all the villages through which they passed.

On September the 21st Savonarola again preached in the Duomo. It is a day to be remembered. The church with its dim light was thronged with people. Anxiety and fear were reflected in their faces. The silence was terrible. The face of the Friar was pallid and his glance threatening, as he mounted the pulpit, while his flashing eyes fixed his audience as he spoke on the Deluge. All at once he shouted out in a terrible voice: "Ecce ego adducam aquas diluvii super terram." (Behold I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth.) The words echoed through the church like peals of thunder, while a shudder of terror spread itself amongst the people. God has verily shut the door of the Ark! There is no longer hope of salvation for the wicked. The historian Cerritani writes: "The terror, the cries, and the weeping caused by this sermon were so great that when it was over every man, woman and child, half-dead and speechless went moaning about the streets of the city."

Pico della Mirandola narrates that "a cold shiver ran throughout his whole body, and his hair stood on end." Pico was one of the marked, for Savonarola had already predicted his death, and the prophetess, Camilla Rucellai, who was a fervid follower of the Prior, had confirmed the prediction. She had told Pico that he

MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI
GALLERIA UFFIZI, FLORENCE

would die on the day when the white lilies would enter into the city of the red lilies.

On November the 17th of that year, Charles VIII entered Florence. On that day Pico della Mirandola died.

. . . . . .

Simone Filipepi, a brother of Sandro Botticelli, tells us in his chronicles that on this memorable day when Savonarola preached his sermon on the Deluge, there were from eight to ten thousand persons present in the church.

This immense congregation was dominated by the magic power of a man in whom they recognised a prophet sent by God; and it can easily be understood how on that day they gave themselves up to a mystic delirium on hearing of the brutal ferocity of the French soldiery.

It is very probable that there was hidden in a corner of the dim church a young man who always went to hear Savonarola preach. This was Michelangelo Buonarroti. He may have heard the cry: "Behold I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth." And this scene of a deluge, the other sermons on Genesis, the symbol of a whale, the severe and dolorous warnings of Amos, Haggai, Ezekiel and Jeremiah and other biblical prophets which he had heard from the lips of Savonarola are all powerfully expressed in the stupendous scenes in the Sistine Chapel.

When later on Michelangelo painted in the Vatican the "Apocalyptic Vision of the Last Judgment," Luther had broken the unity of the Church, and Italy had become almost entirely a slave to the foreigner.

CHAPTER IX

Faith in the French King

THE Italians of the Renaissance possessed many wonderful geniuses in art, letters and sciences, but they failed to form themselves into an undivided body politically.

Machiavelli did at one time conceive the idea that a strong astute prince might be able to unite a country torn by internal dissensions and form her into one solid monarchy such as existed on the other side of the Alps. To do this the little Signories of the country would have to be subjugated and the few Republics would have to be deprived of their liberty. The man upon whom Machiavelli placed his faith was Cesare Borgia. The only power which, owing to her international character, might have proved an obstacle to this unification was the Church. But the ambition of the Pope, who would have rejoiced at seeing his own son Cesare head of the new State, made him favour the undertaking, for its unity and power would thus owe its origin to his own family. The Church herself, freed from the heavy burden and responsibility of temporal rule, defended by a monarchy conscious of its priestly origin and reforming her customs gradually—as she did later

with her Counter-reform—would have contributed to the formation of a new and possibly marvellous political civilisation. Although there were many powerful princes and illustrious leaders who created much of our modern military science, not one had thought of undertaking this union. Party spirit, and rivalry among the different States, which were ruled in turn by tyrants and democrats, created and perpetuated political weakness, and permitted Italy to become a field of competition between France and Spain, both eager to subdue her and win such an attractive prize.

It was Charles VIII who first showed how easy it was to attack Italy. Up to a certain point it is not difficult to understand that a Prince like Ludovico, Duke of Milan, in order to strengthen his dominions, should have sought the aid of Charles, but it is inconceivable and, in fact, shows the short-sighted policy of men blinded by mob eloquence, that a people who were straining after liberty for themselves as citizens, should welcome with delight the arrival of the French.

In Florence the party which in these days would be called democratic—fiercely antagonistic to the Medicean tyranny, and favourable to the republican ideals, —was all for France. Even the same Pier Capponi, who in an outburst of rage, when Charles had threatened not to leave the city, but to call his soldiers to arms, saying, "We will sound our trumpets," had re-

torted: "And we will ring our bells," even he urged the French King to come to Italy.

Certain historians have represented Capponi as a most noble champion of Florentine democracy, but he did not show himself very honourable, inasmuch as when ambassador to Charles, he not only persuaded him to come to Italy, but also to drive away from his kingdom all the Florentine merchants. This was a terribly severe blow to the most vital economic interests of his own country, but demagogues always try to destroy economic conditions, in order to provoke popular revolt at an opportune moment. It was the Medici Signory that had created the prosperity of the Republic, and it was the new democratic government which destroyed it. Savonarola, with his essentially religious views, dared not attribute too much importance to the material prosperity which Florence had enjoyed in peace during seventy years of the rule of the Medici. He saw only the corruption of habits which had followed this excessive wealth and luxury, and he wanted the people to rebel against the Medicean dynasty, always cherishing in his mind his great dream of an Evangelical Renaissance.

When the French were seen to be advancing on Florence, the enemies of the Medici turned against Piero, who fled from the city, and a reward was offered for his capture.

The revolution was a bloodless one, the people con-

tenting themselves with sacking the house of Cardinal Giovanni, and the garden of San Marco, where Cosimo and Lorenzo had accumulated so many treasures of art. The tyrant being expelled, Savonarola now began to preach his sermons on the book of Haggai, the prophet who had urged the Hebrews to rebuild the Temple after their return from the Babylonish captivity. He abstained from alluding to political matters and preached solely on the necessity of faith. "Behold," he says, "the sword has come upon you; the prophecies are being fulfilled; the scourges have begun. Behold! these armies are led by the Lord. Oh Florence, the time for singing and dancing is at an end; now is the time to shed rivers of tears for thy sins. Thy sins, oh Florence, thy sins, oh Rome, thy sins, oh Italy, are the cause of these chastisements. Repent then; give alms; pray; be united. Oh people, I have been for a long time as a father to you; I have laboured all the days of my life to teach you the truths of faith and of godly living. But in return I have only been rewarded with tribulations, scorn and opprobrium. Now at least I desire as compensation to see you doing good deeds. Oh my dear people, what have I ever desired except to see you saved, to see you united? 'Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' "

The Prophet's words created a deep impression upon the people. He had now become their inspiration.

Meanwhile Pier Capponi, the real head of the anti-Medicean revolution, persuaded the Florentines to send ambassadors to Charles to offer him the homage, fidelity and friendship of the Republic, adding: "And do not fail to send Father Girolamo Savonarola as one of the ambassadors, for he possesses the love of all the people."

Savonarola accepted the charge, and on arriving said to Charles: "Oh most Christian King, thou art an instrument in the hand of the Lord. Thou hast been sent by Him to relieve the woes of Italy; and this I have been predicting for many years. The Lord sendeth thee to reform the Church, which now lies prostrate in the dust. But if thou be not just and merciful, if thou dost not respect the city of Florence, its women, its citizens, and its liberty, if thou shouldest forget the task which the Lord has sent thee to perform—then He will choose another to fulfil it. His Hand will be against thee. He will punish thee with terrible scourges. These things declare I unto thee in the Name of the Lord." Savonarola placed in Charles VIII the same faith which Dante had reposed in Henry VII of Luxemburg. Both poet and prophet, although living in different times and under different customs, were aware of the cruel and pitiable divisions existing in Italy. Both wept and inveighed against the widespread ecclesiastical corruptions, and hoped that the strength and power of a foreign monarch might bring order and

justice into the country, and thus promote the desired reform of the Church.

The political faith of Dante was upheld by the idea of an Imperial Rome. The religious and political faith of Savonarola was animated by the theoretic ideal of the people of Israel, oppressed by tyrants, scourged and redeemed by their prophets, jealous of their liberties.

Dante, born and bred in Florence under a corrupt democracy, was an aristocrat. Savonarola, born and living during a time of tyranny and aristocratic corruption was a *popolare*. Dante had risen up against Boniface, and Savonarola withstood Alexander VI. And yet—both poet and friar, while always openly professing a firm sincere Catholic faith, and a devotion and love for the papal throne, were not ashamed to lash with fury the habits and evil doings of those pastors whom they deemed unworthy to occupy it.

Dante's dream of a Catholic Empire and Savonarola's vision of a Florentine Republic, or possibly of a Universal Republic, dominated by the Spirit of Christ, are evidences of the same sublime religious aspiration towards Truth and Justice which inflamed and consumed two of the most sad and noble souls in Italy. What does it matter if those men in whom Alighieri and Savonarola placed so much faith were incapable of putting their ideals into actions and showed themselves unworthy of their divine missions? The beauty

of the mystic visions of these grand poets shines far above poor and sad human realities, and casts a glow of beauty over history. As Dante in his famous letters addressed the German Emperor "Messo di Dio," so Savonarola wrote to the King of France: "The love of God and the wish I have for your honour constrains me to love your crown, for I hold it in so much affection because I believe that, above all other Christian princes, God has chosen you to be His minister in this mysterious matter of the renewing of His Church. For this reason I feel constrained sometimes to warn you of what is needed for the safety of your crown. Illustrious Sire, I would ask you to think how the Omnipotent God works out His designs most wisely and with the proper means, and I would have you to remember that as St. Peter says: 'Satagite ut per bona opera certam vestram vocationem faciatis.' "

The letters sent by Savonarola to Charles VIII, like those of Dante to Henry VII, are full of biblical teachings and the admonitions of the prophets of Israel. They light up the flame of hope in oppressed and weary hearts. Dante and Savonarola believed that they could discern on the horizon a glorious dawn of justice and peace, but unfortunately many years went by before Italy could enjoy the blessings of peace.

CHAPTER X

Religious and Political Programme

CHARLES VIII had entered Florence on the 17th of November, 1494, as a victor. But he did not prove himself worthy of the faith placed in him by Savonarola. He did not fulfil the hopes which had induced the chiefs of the republican party to invite him to come to Italy. He levied exorbitant tribute. He said, and made the people feel, that he had conquered their city, whereas he had entered it without striking a blow. His haughty mien, his disloyalty, his reception of envoys sent by the Medici to treat on the return of the exiled Piero, his praise of the hated tyrant to the chiefs of the people who had engineered the revolution against the Medici, and who now were ready to become his faithful servants, all this was felt to be the height of irony and insult. There were naturally loud complaints against the King. The Florentines felt that they had been deceived, and serious disturbances took place. Frequent discussions followed between the King and the Signory, and Pier Capponi was chosen as the leader of the Florentines. Terms of treaty were fixed. A loyal friendship was to be established between Charles and the Republic, and the King was

to receive the title of "Restorer and Protector of the Liberties of Florence." But against all this high-sounding talk were the very exorbitant demands of Charles, that the democratic government should pay him in three instalments the enormous sum of 120,000 gold florins, and what was morally a still greater insult —that the reward offered for Piero's capture was to be withheld. He promised to restore to the Republic the important fortresses which he had unjustly claimed, but only after he had finished his campaign against Naples. This might be at the end of two years or at any distant date. The signing of this treaty of friendship was made an occasion for rejoicings, and in the evening the whole city was illuminated.

Still Charles remained on. The people, in a state of exasperation, were ready to blaze out at any moment into open hostility and revolt. Savonarola was again asked to intervene and use his influence with Charles, and he at once complied with the request. Armed with his spiritual authority he proceeded to the interview. He pointed out to the King the promises he had made, and the dire results which might ensue if he did not keep his word. Charles finally prepared to leave, but before going "his soldiers took possession without compunction or shame of everything that tempted their greed," even going so far as to sack the splendid Medicean palace where the King had been so honourably entertained. Fra Girolamo, sick at heart, was obliged

to witness this grievous spectacle, but even this did not destroy the faith he had in the providential mission of the King of France.

Shortly after the departure of Charles, Piero dei Medici took refuge in the French camp and was cordially welcomed by the "Restorer and Protector of the Liberties of Florence!" During this interval the political aspect of the Republic had undergone a change, for Pisa, Arezzo, and Montepulciano had all thrown off the yoke, as did many of the other smaller places. While the strong and ancient Medicean State was thus being reduced to fragments, the demagogues of the new democracy were intoxicated with liberty. Savonarola, absorbed in his dreams of spiritual freedom, shut out from political realities, began with the truest fervour to lay the foundations of the city of God. But, alas, his faith drew him into the toils of political intrigues. All those who had gone astray, and been restored by his words, now turned to him for advice. The Signory, which was composed of a species of revolutionary Committee, was constantly turning to ask his opinion and counsel as to the best form of government which would defend and preserve their newly gained liberty. So, in the Duomo on December the 12th, 1494, he preached a sermon to the magistrates and people, in which he disclosed his religious-political programme.

He counselled that, above all, the government

should be inspired by the fear of God, and by a desire to reform the bad customs of the times.

They should draw up such reforms as would make for the betterment of the real prosperity of the people as a whole, and not simply that of a few interested persons.

All was to be done for the common good, not for private interest.

The will of the whole people was to be taken into account in all public affairs, and he advised them to take the Grand Council of the Venetians as their model, modifying it to suit the needs and habits of the Florentines.

He recommended a general amnesty and reconciliation so that the members of the Old and New States might forget all errors.

In the new Constitution of 1494, which was inspired by Savonarola, nearly all these proposals were accepted; and again in April, 1495, he re-affirms this in these words: "In view of the fact that there was a change of government approaching, I did well consider matters—I feared that such a change could not take place without scandal and shedding of blood . . . . so, inspired by God, I began to preach and exhort the people to repent in order to receive the mercy of God. On St. Matthew's day, that is, the 21st of September, I began, and with all the strength which was given me by God, I exhorted the people to make confession, to fast and

to pray. Having done these things willingly, the goodness of God changed Justice into Mercy, and on the 11th of November the government was miraculously changed without either scandal or shedding of blood. You Florentines having then to choose a new government, I called upon the Magnificent Signory, and other magistrates and people—women excepted—to come to the Duomo, and having spoken much of the duty of good citizenship according to the doctrine of the philosophers and holy theologians, I showed to them what was the natural government for you Florentines, and then I proposed four things which ought to be done:

(1) Fear God.
(2) Seek the good of the city rather than private interests.
(3) Make peace with those who formerly governed.
(4) The appeal of the Six Beans."

This latter, the appeal of the Six Beans urged by Savonarola, referred to the administration of justice. Villari explains very clearly the reasons for this reform: "According to the Statutes all political and criminal offences were to be tried by the Eight (Gli Otto di Guardia e Balia) excepting in special cases, when judgment was pronounced by the Signory. The Tribunal of Eight could pass sentence of imprisonment, exile,

confiscation and death by means of six votes (sei fave). Now these magistrates being so frequently changed, and party hatreds so rife in Florence, cruelly unjust and preposterous sentences were constantly pronounced. Accordingly all legal men agreed on the necessity of creating some court of appeal, which, by curbing the excessive authority of the Six Beans, should put a stop to these acts of tyranny, and Savonarola was in favour of this! His political reform was inspired by a sense of rigorous justice and Christian charity, but had to depend on the vacillating character of popular opinion. When Fra Girolamo spoke of being inspired to speak to the people according to the doctrine of the 'philosophers and holy theologians' he forgot that St. Thomas d'Aquinas, the greatest philosopher and theologian of his Order, and of the Church, had said in his *De regimine principum:* 'The States and cities that are not governed by one person only become convulsed by discords, as if to verify the reproof uttered by the Lord through His prophets (Jer. xii. 10), "Many pastors have destroyed my vineyards." ' "

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This was certainly true of a little Italian State in the fifteenth century.

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Savonarola was doomed to know in a very few years how vain and changeable is the favour of the mob.

CHAPTER XI

The Pope's Censure

THE presence of Charles VIII in Italy was found to be utterly insupportable, not only to the people, but also to the princes who had proposed and desired his advent. He had taken possession of Naples with the greatest ease, for the Aragonese had fled precipitously. The Neapolitans, however, before long began to regret the departure of the old tyrants, for the French made themselves as obnoxious in Naples as they had in Florence. Their insolent bearing and haughty behaviour to the inhabitants exasperated them. During the spring of 1495 a League was formed between the Republic of Venice, the Pope, the Emperor, and the King of Spain, with the object of collecting together an army of sufficient strength to drive the French out of Italy.

The principal promoter of this compact was Ludovico the Moor, Duke of Milan, the very man who had been the first to invite Charles to cross the Alps into Italy. By this time the whole country was up in arms against the invader. Florence alone remained aloof, and this notwithstanding that she had not received back her fortresses, which had been sold to the highest bid-

ders, and that the French still flirted with Piero dei Medici, her enemy. A flattering invitation to join the League was sent to Savonarola and the Florentines, but it was not accepted. They preferred to remain loyal to Charles. Savonarola still firmly believed in the providential mission of the French King, and having no other thought than the reform of the Church and the defence of the Florentines he feared that, should Charles depart, grave results might ensue. He mistrusted the Pope, and feared that his temporal authority might be strengthened. The return to power of the Medici was not unlikely, seeing that the other Italian Signory now looked with disfavour on the consolidation of a new republic, a republic opposed to all tyranny, which would be like a bright torch in the midst of Italy, ready at any moment to set the rest of the country on fire—so they naturally wished to subdue it. Savonarola therefore saw that the only hope Florence had was to keep the French on her side. About this time Commines, the ambassador of Charles, came to Florence, and was cordially welcomed by the Prior, but at the same time Savonarola did not fail to reprove the King's lack of honour and his failure in keeping the promises he had made, especially his delay in starting the ecclesiastical reforms he had pledged himself to promote. He wrote to him: "The Florentines will always be loyal and faithful to you, Majesty; and the city of Florence, in the centre of Italy, will be

like the anchor in the ship. . . . It is the Will of God that the Florentines should be allied to your Majesty, and you to them, and under your banner, protection and favour, their national liberty will be extended, and not the power and freedom of any individual citizen. For Divine Providence has decreed that all tyrants should be cast down, as well as all private citizens who should wish to usurp dominion and rule in this flourishing Florentine Republic as was done in the past."

He also threatened Charles that should he again neglect to carry out the Lord's behests, punishment would overtake him, but comforted him with the assurance that although he "would have to fight desperately against his enemies, he would eventually emerge safely from the present ordeal."

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There is no doubt that it was the attitude of Savonarola and the Florentines at this juncture, when they showed themselves so hostile to the League, which was the first and justifiable reason for the future war which the Pontiff waged against Florence, and more especially against the ecclesiastic who proclaimed—as if it were the will of God—the triumph of the republican ideal.

When the troops of Charles met the allied armies at Fornovo, they were easily outnumbered. A pitched battle took place, but no decisive victory could be

claimed by either side. The French, however, succeeded in their purpose of forcing a passage, so that Charles could re-enter France. The allies, now that the French had left Italy, were prepared to deal with Florence. They were filled with hatred of the new democratic government and determined to punish Florence for her fidelity to Charles and her refusal to join the League. So they decided on the restoration of the Medici. Florence with her new régime was now in grave danger, beset as she was on all sides by enemies. Also within her own gates there were discords. There were those who hated Savonarola, those who might in these days be called anticlerical. These all joined together to form a party called the Arrabbiati, bound in a common hatred to fight with every means in their power against the followers of Savonarola, whom they disrespectfully called Piagnoni. The Arrabbiati more than once made attempts on the life of the Prior, and his friends always escorted him when he went to the Duomo, carrying arms in case of assault. The Arrabbiati also excited against him theologians and philosophers, and even a Dominican, of S. Maria Novella, a certain Garofanino.[1] The attacks of one of his own Order greatly grieved the Prior, who said: "Now the words of my Lord can be applied to me, 'Filii matris meae pugnaverunt contra me.' How

[1] *Cf.* Garofanino (spicy little clove) was the nickname applied to Tommaso da Rieti, a diminutive friar noted for his cleverness in argument.

it saddens me to see that one of my fiercest enemies wears my own habit."

Envy, discord, jealousy, were now rife in Florence. And yet Savonarola with his tremendous faith conquered them.

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The vigilant eye of Rome continued, nevertheless, to be turned suspiciously towards the city of Florence.

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The sermons which the Prior preached during this period were printed immediately and distributed throughout the country. His enemies contrived that one of them should fall into the hands of the Pope. It contained these words: "Oh Italy! Oh Princes! Oh Prelates of the Church! the Wrath of God is upon you, and there is no escape unless you are converted. Oh Florence! Oh Italy! adversity has overtaken you because of your sins."

The result of this was that an order arrived from Rome for Savonarola to go to Lucca, to preach the Lenten sermons. This was a light form of discipline with the object of withdrawing the Prior from Florence for a while. The Signory, however, sent to their ambassador in Rome asking him to beg that Savonarola might remain in Florence, and after some delay the order was revoked, and permission given to the Prior to preach the Lenten sermons in his own city.

The Pope, however, ardently wished Savonarola to

be removed from Florence. He tried persuasion and showed him kindnesses. Calumnies spread about him were ignored; and even Fra Mariano's venomous attacks were not greatly heeded by the Pontiff. One day in the Pontifical Court he had preached a sermon in which he called Savonarola "a heretic, a sower of scandals, an instrument of the devil and a false prophet."

On the 28th of July, 1495, the Holy Father sent to Savonarola an affectionate paternal letter in which he said: "To our well-beloved son, greeting and the apostolic benediction. We have heard that of all the workers in the vineyard of the Lord thou art the most zealous, for which we are greatly rejoiced and praise the Omnipotent God, for granting thee such favour. We do not doubt but that thou canst, through the Divine Spirit, sow the Word of God in the midst of Christian people and reap fruit a hundredfold." Then, continuing, he says that having heard that Savonarola "predicts future events, not from natural sources but from God Himself by divine revelation, he was desirous of knowing more about the matter, and that in virtue of holy obedience he invites and exhorts him to come to Rome without delay, promising that he would be welcomed with fatherly and charitable love."

We cannot in justice affirm definitely that the Pope with this letter wished to draw Savonarola to Rome, either in order to have him assassinated during the journey, or to allow him to die in a dungeon of the

Castel Sant Angelo, as has been suggested by some. Alexander had certain grave political reasons which induced him to keep the Prior of San Marco away from Florence, for it was he who persuaded the people to act against the League. But this does not seem a sufficient reason why the Pope should nourish fierce personal rancour against a priest whose Christian and apostolic zeal was so well known to him. Besides, he had already shown his approbation by sending him the Brief in which he had permitted the convent of San Marco to be separated from the Lombardy Congregation. This was placing Savonarola in a position of very high ecclesiastical dignity. In the Friar's reply to the Pope, he remarks: "I desire above everything to behold the shrine of the Apostles Peter and Paul, in order to adore the relics of all the saints, and still more willingly would I have gone to Rome when the Holy Father deigns to summon to him his humble servant. But I have only just recovered from a most serious malady, which prevented me from preaching and study, and which still threatens my life. I am furthermore obliged rather to obey the benign purpose of the command, than the words in which it is issued. Now, inasmuch as the Lord by my means has saved this city from much bloodshed, and placed it under good and holy laws, there are many enemies both within and without the city, who, having sought to enslave it and been prevented, now seek my blood, and have frequently

attempted my life by steel and poison, wherefore I could not move from here without manifest peril, nor can I go about the city without an armed escort. Again, this newly formed government that the Lord has been pleased by my means to give to Florence is not yet firmly rooted, and is visibly in danger unless continually assisted. Wherefore in the judgment of all good and experienced citizens my departure would be of great hurt to the city, while of very little profit to Rome. I cannot suppose that my superior would wish for the ruin of a whole city, and therefore, trust that Your Holiness will graciously accede to this delay, so that the reform started by the Lord's will may be brought to perfection. I feel certain that it is for the good of this reform that the Lord has now raised up these hindrances to my journey. Should Your Holiness desire greater certitude on the scourges that I publicly predicted would fall upon Italy, and also my remarks about the reform of the Church, you will find them all written down in my book which is now being published (*Compendium Revelationum*).

"I desired to have these predictions printed so that should they not be fulfilled, the whole world may know me as a false prophet.

"But other things of a more hidden nature I must still keep veiled, for I cannot, at present, reveal them to any mortal. Therefore, I beseech Your Holiness that you would accept my very true and plain excuses,

and believe that it is my ardent desire to come to Rome, and as soon as possible I shall spur myself to start." The Pope sent no reply to this letter, but let Savonarola understand that he accepted his excuses. He could, by virtue of his ecclesiastical power, have forced him to come. But he did not wish to exercise this power. This reveals a spirit of prudence which was traditional in the Curia Romana.

A few days later, however, on the 31st of July, there reached the Pope a detailed account of a sermon preached in the Duomo on the 28th. In this sermon Savonarola, preaching to the Signory and the Magistrates, spoke for the first time of the advisability of putting to death the enemies of God and of the Republic. It was an eminently political sermon. The Pope, who had accepted the Friar's excuses, was naturally sadly impressed by this sermon, which the enemies of Fra Girolamo had transmitted with all its expressions highly exaggerated. And it can hardly be surprising to find that after mature reflection, the Pope decided on the 8th of September to send a new Brief, addressed to the friars of Santa Croce. In this letter he designates Savonarola as a "disseminator of false doctrine," and orders his being sent to Rome. The Brief was not directed to the friars of San Marco, and their Prior. Had this been done, he feared it would have been kept secret and its contents would not have been made public to the other priests and friars in Florence. The

Pope's censure and disapproval of the political attitude of Savonarola needed to be made clear. Still Savonarola paid no attention. In spite of the fact that the return of the Medici was threatening to destroy the liberty of the Florentines, and to a certain extent the influence of his own religious mission, he continued to preach against the enemies of Christ and of the Republic.

When it was said that Piero dei Medici accompanied by the allies was marching on Florence, Savonarola was so moved with indignation that he preached a sermon in the Duomo in which he gave vent to the most violent language. He saw that the city was in peril, and did not hesitate to advise the most rigorous measures for her defence, reminding his hearers that in similar circumstances the ancient Romans had stopped at nothing. "You need to use the same means that the Romans used against those who would restore Tarquin. Would you have regard for private citizens when it is a question of the defence of your city in peril? Do justice—say I. Cut off his head, even should he be the head of the house, cut off his head. If he would be tyrant, if he would establish a government of private citizens, he will be accursed of God for ever and ever." In such words Savonarola, carried away by passion, seemed to assert (contrary to the doctrines of the Church) that it was necessary for the salvation of the soul to believe in the republican régime,

that is, a belief in one particular form of government. He thus gravely confounded politics with religion, making belief in the Republic an article of faith. While recognising the purity of the religious ideals which animated the prophet to follow this particular way, we must likewise admit that the Pope had reason to condemn a man, a friar, who raised his republican doctrine to the level of a dogma of faith. While the Friar had limited himself to speaking with burning words of the corrupt habits of the dignitaries of the Curia Romana, and of the princes, the Pope had kept silent, but now that Savonarola began to attack the Catholic doctrine with the acid of his political passion, the Pope had to take notice, and designate him as a disseminator of scandal and false doctrine. He forbade him to preach, and decreed that the monastery of San Marco should be united to the Dominican Order of Lombardy, thus depriving it of its autonomy.

Fra Girolamo appeared to be submissive. He told the Pope that he was ready, if he should be in error, not only to correct himself, but also to make amends before all the people. "And now I do repeat that which I have always affirmed—that I submit myself and all my writings to the correction of the Holy Roman Church."

Alexander, wishing to show himself indulgent, suspended with another Brief, dated the 16th of October, the threatened union of San Marco with the Lombardy

Province, but only on condition that Savonarola abstained from preaching. But events were hastening to a climax.

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The words of Savonarola had not remained unheeded by the people. Four days after the first sermon the Signory offered a reward of 4000 broad gold florins, to whomsoever would assassinate Piero dei Medici, who was guilty of attempting the ruin of the Republic by inciting against it "not only many barons of Rome, but the Pontiff and nearly all the powers of Italy." In this common hatred against the Medici, there was for a time a lull in the discordant quarrels of the Arrabbiati and the Piagnoni. All the republicans armed themselves in defence of their threatened liberty; everybody was ready to withstand any attack upon it. But there was no need for any fighting, for Piero's attempt was doomed to failure. His allies did not give him the promised help, and he had again to seek shelter elsewhere. So great were the rejoicings of the Florentines at the peril they had escaped that they decided to celebrate it in a manner worthy of the new government by constructing a large hall in the Palazzo Pubblico where the conference of the Great Council could be held. All the best artists were consulted, and Leonardo da Vinci, the young Michelangelo, Giuliano da San Gallo and Baccio d'Agnolo gave advice about its construction. The work, which was

entrusted to Francesco di Domenico and Simone di Tommaso del Pollaiuolo (also called Il Cronaca), a devoted follower of Savonarola, was finished in a very short time. The Great Council met there on April the 26th, 1496, and on the 20th of August Savonarola made a memorable speech in the hall, his theme being praise of the new government. It was about this time that the marvellous statue of Judith and Holofernes, sculptured by Donatello for the Medici, was placed on the platform in front of the Palazzo Pubblico, as a symbol of the triumph of freedom over tyranny. The Latin inscription reads:

Exemplum sal: pub: cives posuere mccccxcv
(The citizens placed this symbol of public safety here in 1495.)

The people saw in Savonarola a hero that corresponded to the proud image of the Hebrew heroine. They recognised in him their liberator.

But he—in the midst of the general rejoicings—was oppressed by profound melancholy, and disturbed by dark presentiments. There is no doubt that his conflict with the Pope, the highest ecclesiastical authority, must have caused him acute suffering. He was convinced that all the obstacles emanating from Rome were caused by the envy and hatred of his personal enemies. He believed that it was they, who, in an

atmosphere of calumny, poisoned the Pontiff's mind against him. He knew the Pope—he knew Alexander to be a worldly man, a man of the worst habits—and how easily he was influenced. But this, instead of lessening, increased the Friar's own bewilderment. He foresaw his future as if written in a dark sky, with no star to brighten it. The applause of the public was unable to comfort or support him during these days. He believed himself destined by God to tread a dark and lonely road. And again he longed to confide in his mother, as he had done when a lad. Although far away in body, she was never far from his heart. He thought of her frequently and wrote to her constantly. In one letter full of tenderness he exhorts her to live close to God, and re-affirms his own faith in the Divine Will in these words: "I would that your faith, were it possible, could be like that of the holy Hebrew women of the Old Testament, so that you might be enabled without shedding a tear to look upon your children martyred before your eyes. Dearest mother, I do not say this through any desire to refrain from comforting you, but because I wish to prepare you—lest I may have to die."

In one sermon he alludes to his early life in a parable which revealed his innermost thoughts: "A youth left his home and went forth on the sea to fish, and, while fishing, the owner of the boat steered far out, so that the port could no more be seen. Whereupon

the youth burst into loud lamentations. Oh Florence, the youth who laments stands here in this pulpit. I was led from my own home to the port of religion. I went into that port at the age of twenty-three. I went to search for two things which I desired greatly—liberty and quiet. But then I looked upon the waters of this world, and by preaching I began to win a few souls. Seeing that I found pleasure in this, the Lord placed me in a vessel and carried me out to the open sea. I now am in the midst of the big sea. I cannot see the shore. *Undique sunt angustiæ.* (Sufferings are on every side of me.) Storms and tempests are gathering before my eyes. I have lost sight of the port behind me. The winds carry me farther on. On my right hand are the chosen who implore my help. On my left are the demons and the wicked who assail and molest me. Above I see Eternal Goodness urging me to hope. Below is hell, and I as a man must fear it, since without the help of God I must fall into it. Oh Lord, oh Lord, where hast Thou led me? Through seeking to save a few souls I have come into a place whence there is no return to peace. Why hast Thou made me a man of disturbance and discord over the whole earth? I was free, and am now the slave of all men. I see war and discord coming upon me from every side. You, at least, oh my friends, oh chosen of God, for whom I travail day and night, have pity on me."

This is the woeful cry of a soul gasping vainly at the door of perfect peace and true liberty—the cry of a man carried away by the impetuous waves of the ocean farther and farther into darkness and storm towards an unhappy death.

CHAPTER XII

Savonarola is Offered a Cardinal's Hat

SAVONAROLA suffered in silence, while the Signory intervened in order to obtain from Rome a revocation of his suspension from preaching. They begged of Cardinal Carafa, who was a protector of the Order of St. Dominic, to use his influence. On the 26th of January, 1496, a letter was sent to Messer Ricciardo Becchi, the Florentine Ambassador in Rome, recommending to him the case of the Friar, saying: "You could do nothing that would be more grateful and acceptable to all your citizens, or be better appreciated by the good sense of all this people." The efforts of the Cardinal Carafa and the solicitations of Becchi seem to have again appealed to the indulgence of the Pope, who permitted the Friar to preach during Lent, 1496, but it is not clearly known whether it was really these efforts which induced Alexander to relent. Numerous historians mention that the Pope, wishing to conciliate Savonarola, went even so far as to offer him a cardinal's hat, and that before doing so a learned Dominican bishop was asked to examine the Friar's sermons in order to see if they contained any incriminat-

ing matter, and found that all the teachings therein were in accord with Catholic doctrine.

It was then that the Pope thought of removing Savonarola far from Florence by raising him to the Cardinalate, thus proving his fidelity to the tradition of prudence of the Curia Romana—expressed in the formula *Promoveatur, ut amoveatur.* (Promote so as to remove.)

Savonarola, in a sermon preached in August, 1496, alluded to this flattering offer, which he had disdainfully refused, and, having explained his reasons, he turned to the Crucifix fixed on his pulpit and pointing to it said: "I desire neither hats nor mitres, be they great or small; I desire naught save that which Thou hast given to Thy saints—death—a crimson hat—a hat of blood—those are all that I desire."

The acceptance of a cardinal's hat would have seemed to him as practically an act of simony. Would not a position of such high ecclesiastical dignity serve to shut tight his lips, and prevent him from speaking out the truth? But S. Bernardino of Siena had for the same reason refused the mitre three times. Was it not his duty to do likewise?

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So eager were the Florentines to see him back in his pulpit that the Signory prayed him to preach during the ensuing Lent. On February the 17th he began his course of sermons on the prophets Amos and

Zachariah, preaching in the Duomo. In these sermons he gives full vent to the bitterness which was in his heart.

He explained first of all that his long silence was not due to fatigue, to conscientious scruples, or to cowardice. Then he made the following profession of faith: "I have always believed and do believe all that is believed by the Holy Roman Church, and have ever submitted, and do submit myself to her. . . . I have written to Rome that if I have preached or written any heretical thing. . . . I am willing and ready to amend me, and retract my words here in public. . . . I am always prepared to give obedience to the Roman Church, and to declare that whosoever disobeys her will be damned. . . . I declare that the Catholic Church will endure until the day of Judgment. . . . The superior may not give me any command which is contrary to the rules of my Order. The Pope may not give me any commands which are contrary to charity or the Gospel. I do not believe that the Pope would ever try to do so, but were he to do so, I should say to him: 'Now thou art no pastor. Thou art not the Church of Rome. Thou art in error.' Whenever it be clearly seen that the commands of superiors are contrary to those of God, and especially to the precepts of charity, no one in such case is bound to obedience, for it is written: 'Oportet obedire magis Deo quam hominibus.'" (It is better to obey God than man.)

Savonarola was in the right on this point of doctrine, and he did not hide from himself how difficult and grave it was for a Catholic to decide between his own personal conviction and the injunction of a superior, which might be considered faulty. He then quickly adds: "If, however, the case is not clear or there is the slightest doubt, then we must always obey." Making clear in this way the reason of his obedience to the Pope, he proceeded to refer to his own case, saying: "Were I to see clearly that my departure from a city would be the spiritual and temporal ruin of my people, I would obey no living man that commanded me to depart. . . . forasmuch as in obeying him I should be disobeying the command of the Lord, and because I should presume that my superior had no intention to do evil but had been deceived by false reports. Oh thou that writest so many lies to Rome, what wilt thou write now? I know well what thou wilt write. What then, Oh Friar? Thou wilt write that I have said that one need not obey the Pope, and that I will not obey him. I do not say this. Write that which I have said, and thou shalt see that it will not be suited for thy purpose." Fra Girolamo in this declaration showed explicitly that he spoke in good faith, and was definitely and firmly Catholic in his doctrines. But he erred in presuming that it was he who was the only person who could save the Florentines, both spiritually and temporally. And he certainly erred in the observance of

discipline. He forgot that an ecclesiastic, a monk, when under censure, even if he considered it unjust censure, was in duty bound to abstain from exercising his sacred ministry and from preaching, until the interdict was withdrawn. Nor did the fact that he maintained that the Pontiff's Briefs—being based on false and calumnious reports—were null and void, justify him in his attitude. Urged by that inward fire which consumed him, he broke through all discipline, and from the pulpit uttered this confession: "When I saw that many of the good were becoming cold, that the wicked were gaining strength and the work of the Lord was being overthrown, I boldly decided to return to the pulpit. . . . But first of all I turned to the Lord, saying: 'I was rejoicing in my peace and tranquillity when Thou didst draw me forth, showing me Thy Light, and I became even as the moth that is drawn to the light and burns its wings. Oh Lord, my wings of contemplation are burnt. I have embarked on a stormy sea, I am assailed on all sides by contrary winds. . . . I would fain reach the port, but cannot find the way. I would fain be at rest and repose, but can find no resting place. I would fain remain still and silent, but this I cannot do, for the Word of God is as a fire in my heart, and if I do not give it vent it will consume the marrow of my bones. Arise, oh Lord, and help me, since Thou wouldest have me pass through this deep sea, and let Thy Will be done.' "

These words, so sadly and poignantly sincere, are not the accents of a haughty, proud man, but of a man who struggles with his own feelings. They are the cry of a soul that lives and suffers. He is fully conscious of the tragic destiny that awaits him. Above every other thought was the hope of reform in the Church; next came his love for the liberty of Florence.

He placed nearly all his faith in the young, for the older people had disappointed him, and he exclaims: "In you, young men, is my hope, and the hope of the Lord. You will govern well the city of Florence, for you have not the evil tendencies of your fathers, who know not how to free themselves from tyrannical rule, nor do they understand how great is the gift of liberty which the Lord has bestowed on the people. . . . As for you, old men, you pass your days in your clubs and workshops speaking evil things. In your letters you write many lies from Florence—that is why many say that I have upset Italy, and this has been charged against me, even in Pontifical documents. Oh you fools! 'Quis vos fascinavit non obedire veritati.' (Who has beguiled you that you will not obey the truth.)

"Where are my squadrons and my money with which to upset Italy? . . . Oh citizens, unless you live in the fear of God, and love not free government, the Lord will bring sorrows upon you, and only fulfil to your children his promises of happiness to Florence."

He spoke every day to the young people, who were

inflamed by his passionate appeal to their sympathy. He had erected a large amphitheatre in the Duomo, where the children occupied seats during the sermons. There were multitudes of young children in the city, all fired by the ideals of the Friar, and as always happens with youth they were the first to put into practice, in a spirit of violence, the ideas of reform.

They were divided into bands. They marched through the streets singing hymns. They entered by force into the houses. They snatched from the hands of the players their cards and their dice. They stripped walls of all obscene pictures. They took away from the bookshelves all licentious literature. They searched the trunks of women, and bore off false hair, rouge boxes and all feminine vanities. These were cast in heaps on the squares and streets, where they were burned amidst shouts of joy. Simone Filipepi, in his chronicles, says: "The children, thus converted, held the wicked amongst the people in a state of terror. They went about reasoning with and pursuing gamblers and similar base persons with so much zeal and spirit that they were quite unable to offer any resistance to their attacks. Some of the parents, peaceful men, bound to the old régime, would occasionally try to take away their children from this work of destruction. They even wished to send them away to France far from the influence of Savonarola. They tried to bring them back to their workshops and places of business.

But their leader exhorted them to rebel and refuse to desert the holy work of reform and of liberty on which they had embarked. He apostrophised the fathers of the children: 'Send them wherever you wish, they will certainly return.' But Savonarola all the while enjoined on the youths to be studious and charitable. He did not advise them to become monks, but to make themselves good citizens."

These events which were taking place in Florence created the worst possible impression in Rome. Becchi, the ambassador (or orator, as ambassadors were also called) to the Holy See, repeated to the Dieci that which was said about Savonarola at the Vatican.

He had heard from the Pope himself the following remonstrance: "First of all he continues to preach against the will of the Pope, to whom he pays no heed. Secondly, he speaks ill of His Holiness, openly and in public. He speaks of the Cardinals and of all the Roman Court, as if he were the head of everything. Thirdly, he writes, speaks and affirms that he is a prophet, that he speaks with God, with Our Lady, and with the saints. He predicts the future with much assurance. Fourthly, he excites the people and the children—not allowing those to whom it belongs to deliberate, discern and judge. Fifthly, although these accusations may not all be true, still it is infamous and dishonourable to the city that a friar should govern and dispose, and should encourage children in such a

way that the whole world is able to say: 'Fra Girolamo and children govern Florence; they elect the Signori, the Otto, the Dieci and the Ottanta; they mete out punishment; and it is said that the citizens are afraid of them, and dare not say or do anything which is contrary to the will of the Friar.' Even to listen to them is a shame and an infamy. Here in Rome in the Court everybody laughs at them, and there are many of those who love Florence who grieve, for they fear that this Friar and these children may cause some grave scandal and bring ruin on the city. The Florentines seem to have lost their heads and their reputations and are unable to put an end to these things. Believe me, the Pope is greatly angered, and although he is incensed against Florence for many other reasons, this particular conduct of Fra Girolamo is the greatest grief of all."

Savonarola paid no attention to this criticism of the Pope. He instituted a "Monte di Pietà" which was solemnly inaugurated by his young men.

The feast fell on Palm Sunday, 1496. The children collected large sums for the poor, and Savonarola, addressing them, concluded with these words: "Oh Lord, from the mouths of these babes will come Thy real praise. The philosophers praise Thee according to the light of the world, but these by supernatural light. Philosophers praise Thee from self-love, these with simplicity; philosophers with words, these with works."

Then turning to the people, having confounded the humanists and learned men, he raised the Crucifix on high and cried out: "Florence, behold, this is the King of the whole world. He would fain be your king. Will ye receive Him?" The immense crowd, dominated by the enthusiasm of the youths, broke out into acclamations crying: "Long live Christ, our King!" while an enormously big choir intoned the Savonarolian hymn:

Viva, viva in nostro core
Cristo re, duce e signore!
Ciascun purghi l'intelletto,
La memoria e voluntade,
Del terrestre e vano affetto;
Arda tutto in caritade,
Contemplando la bontade
Di Jesù re di Fiorenza.

Se volete Jesù regni
Per sua grazia in vostro core,
Tutti gli odi e pravi sdegni
Commutate in dolce amore,
Discacciando ogni rancore,
Ciascun prende in sè la pace;
Questo è quel che a Jesù piace,
Su nel cielo, e qui nel core.

(Live, oh live in our hearts, Christ, our King and chief and Lord. Let each one purge his mind and memory and will of earthly and vain affections. Let him burn with charity, when contemplating the loving kindness of Jesus, King of Florence. If ye would have Jesus reign in your hearts change all your hate and evil wrath into tender love, casting forth all rancour; let each dwell in peace. This is that which is pleasing to Jesus in Heaven above, and here in our hearts.)

CHAPTER XIII

His Influence on the Artistic Life of Florence

I

THIS Savonarolian Florence, whose liberty was menaced by the Pope, by the Republic of Venice, by Ludovico the Moor, and by the most powerful Signory of Italy, lived for a while in a state of most marvellous mystic exaltation. She stands out from a picture of the Renaissance with its pagan elegancies, its calm scepticism and soft, graceful sensuality like a great model of mediæval faith. Some great modern writers have misunderstood this awakening of Christian consciousness, and the man who caused it. Goethe says of Savonarola: "A fantastic and ridiculous monster, who in an ungrateful, obstinate, and terrible manner opposes himself to the grandiose, lovely, serene life of Florence." Carducci writes: "The Renaissance blossomed forth everywhere, from sculpture, painting, books. Flesh rebelled against spirit, reason against mysticism; and yet he, poor Friar, erecting his simple barriers against art and Nature, parodied arguments and discussions with Rome. . . . And he did not understand and feel that the reform of Italy was the pagan Renaissance, that the purely religious reform was re-

served for other nations, nations that were more sincerely Christian. He, poor Friar, with his Piagnoni and their fantastic doings, did not see how Niccolò Machiavelli stood compassionately smiling in some corner of the Piazza."

Thus judged Carducci, against the facts of history; for in reality Savonarola, even while the pagan Renaissance was in full swing, was powerful enough to excite in Florence, the stronghold, such a revival of Christian life and of Christian art, that to-day seems nothing less than marvellous. He foresaw with his prophetic vision that the reform of Italy would be religious, that, although the country was on the point of losing all her political liberties through lack of faith, and corruption of habits, she would again find her true self, and protect the spiritual dominion of Rome with a legion of great saints, victoriously uplifting her banner of supremacy in all parts of the world. She would oppose the threatening Teutonic rebellion of Luther and his protectors with her Catholic Counter-reform, crowned by the Council of Trent, which would raise strong and insuperable barriers between her and Protestantism.

It may be true that "the pale face of Machiavelli did break forth into a pitiful smile of irony when regarding the poor Friar." But there is no doubt that another face, terribly pale with the agony of emotion, gazed on the flashing eyes of the Prophet—and it is well known that the vision of that face, of those eyes, was never

DEATH OFFERING A YOUTH THE CHOICE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL
(FROM "L'ARTE DEL BEN MORIRE," 1496)

forgotten by Michelangelo Buonarroti; and when the fire consumed the body of Savonarola and the ashes were dispersed, Michelangelo, the greatest genius of the day, expressed his infinite pity for the death of the hero in that wonderful piece of sculpture—the "Pieta" (now in St. Peter's, Rome), where the Son of Man, the Innocent, lies dead with His mother bending over His inanimate body.

It may be said that the art of Michelangelo derives its inspiration from this feeling of pity, which was awakened in his heart after the martyrdom of Savonarola. It exalted the idea of human grief, which can only find consolation through a humble faith in the mystery of the Crucifixion. Michelangelo throughout his long life never ceased to represent this infinite sadness in his pictures of the Son of God, and even when quite an old man the sermons of Savonarola on Death influenced his work. Alone with his genius and his God, he carved on the wall of a house near the Forum of Trajan a figure of death bearing a coffin, above which was written:

Io dico a voi ch'al mondo avete dato
L'anima e 'l corpo e lo spirito insieme,
In questa cassa oscura è 'l vostro lato.

(I say to thee who for the world hast lived
And given freely body, mind and spirit
This dark and gloomy box is now thy limit.)

The Art of Dying a Good Death (*L'Arte del Ben Morire*), a sermon preached by Savonarola on All Soul's Day, 1496, was published and illustrated with most beautiful engravings. Three editions were issued, all illustrated to depict Death in its various forms. One scene shows us a desolate landscape where the bare branches of the trees are twisted into different shapes. On the ground lie the bodies of a bishop, a nun and two youths. Death hovers overhead; a horrible figure waving in his left hand a card, on which is inscribed: "*Ego sum*" (I am), and in his right hand he holds his scythe. Another scene shows us Paradise, with God Almighty surrounded by his angels, and Lucifer by his demons. In the background are two cities, and between them stands Death. He lifts his right hand on high, and points downwards with his left. Facing him stands a terrified youth at whom he hurls the tremendous choice: "There above, or there below?" During this sermon he advises his hearers to keep the idea of death always before their eyes. . . . "If thou wouldest do well and flee from sin always have before thine eyes a vivid picture of death, always bear it in thy mind, and in every work thou dost undertake remind thyself of death. When thou arisest in the morning the first thing thou shouldest do is to make the Sign of the Cross, and then thou shouldest say, 'Remember! oh man that thou art dust and ashes, and to dust thou must return.'" Michelangelo, who had heard these words of

Alinari

PORTRAIT OF SANDRO BOTTICELLI IN THE PICTURE
"ADORATION OF THE MAGI"
GALLERIA UFFIZI, FLORENCE

the Friar and meditated upon them, hearkened to the advice and did make for himself a "vivid picture of Death," and it is to this strong imagination that we owe his masterpieces of religious art and the solemn representation of the Last Judgment. The dominating thought of Michelangelo was that of Death. Writing to Vasari, he says: "No thought is born in me which has not Death engraved upon it." And to Giannotti he said: "It is this thought of Death which alone can make us aware of our own true personality. For when we place our soul to face Death we can no longer deceive ourselves, for when faced by Death we are also faced by the consideration of that new life that comes after death. We are faced with the thought of God, whom we cannot deceive; so we are compelled to look at ourselves in the face of Truth, and to distinguish between the true and real value of our inner spiritual self and the outer temporal person. It is this thought that keeps our soul for God, that keeps our spiritual self united, that prevents us dispersing it among relatives, friends, great teachers, ambitions, desires, etc., for all these would keep our thoughts away from God, would rob Him of our souls, for earthly things would rob man of his best part, his spiritual part.

"The effect of the thought of Death is marvellous, for while Death destroys by its very nature, yet it preserves and maintains all those who think upon it, for it prevents them from giving way to human passions.

"Having the consciousness that there is an end to this present life, they desire to make more perfect their spiritual selves."

. . . . . .

Those who have studied the works of the geniuses of this time cannot fail to be struck by the influence that Savonarola exercised over the minds of artists and literary men, so that it is difficult to understand the words of Carducci, to which reference has already been made.

Savonarola would often make a comparison between the artist and love—saying: "The works of a good painter attract men so much that while looking at them they become entranced and so absorbed in ecstasy as to forget everything around them. Even so, the love of Jesus Christ fills the soul to the exclusion of all else." Michelangelo felt in himself the effect of this love whenever he found in Nature an aspect of divine beauty. In one sonnet he says:

La forza d'un bel volto al ciel mi sprona
Ch'altro in terra non è che mi diletti.

(The beauty of a lovely face draws me towards heaven when nothing else on earth charms me.)

. . . . . .

Nè Dio sè stesso manifesta altrove
Più che in alcun leggiadro mortal velo
Dov'occhio sano in sua virtù si specchi.

(God does not manifest Himself anywhere in a higher degree than He does in a beautiful mortal frame where the eye reflects the virtue of the mind.)

Michelangelo loved that physical beauty which both Marsilio Ficino and Savonarola were wont to call "the splendour of the divine face."

The poetry of Michelangelo, fervid and sincere, reflects the highest artistic inspirations, the sublimest elevation of men who lived and breathed in the rare atmosphere created by Savonarola in Florence.

Beauty, considered according to the Neoplatonic theory of the philosophers of Alexandria as a reflection of the Divine, must have inspired Savonarola and the greatest artists of the Renaissance. When Leonardo da Vinci painted his "Last Supper," he would remain gazing for half a day at his canvas, without touching a brush, wondering anxiously how he could adequately paint the scene, and especially the head of Christ, "for which," says Vasari, "he did not wish to seek a model on earth, and he could not even in the highest flight of imagination conceive any idea of beauty and heavenly grace that would equal that of Incarnate Divinity."

This search for ideal beauty which transcends that found in nature was also ardently pursued by Raphael. In a letter to Castiglione he explains how he chose his types for his Madonnas. He confesses that he does

not regard the models themselves so much "as a certain ideal which he has in his own mind, and which he strives to discover in his models."

Another of Savonarola's disciples was Bartolomeo della Porta, the master of Raphael. After the martyrdom of the Friar he was so overcome with grief that he did not touch a brush for four years, and eventually joined the Dominican Order. Raphael, in the "Stanze" of the Vatican, mindful of the lessons learned by him in the Florentine Monastery of San Marco, has painted with his wonderful and luminous brush those stupendous frescoes of the School of Athens and the "Disputa del Sacramento," in which he reveals to us a representation of Greek and Christian thought united in a supreme harmony.

Then we have Pico della Mirandola, Poliziano, Zanobi Acciaiuoli, Marsilio Ficino, Benivieni, Lorenzo di Credi, Botticelli and the brothers della Robbia, one of whom was admitted by the Prior to the Dominican Order. These were all fervent Savonarolians, whose works were influenced by the Prophet's teachings, inspiring in them a divine fervour, which they introduced into their pictures. But Michelangelo and Botticelli showed the force of these teachings more intensely than did any of the others.

Fra Girolamo lighted in the soul of Botticelli a divine fire. Many among modern historians of art, enthusiastic admirers of the sweetness and springlike bloom of

the artist's work, regard with ostentatious carelessness and often judge with contempt the mystic works of Botticelli, which really represent one of his highest and best artistic expressions. The pictures painted by Botticelli while under the influence of Fra Girolamo are the "Derelitta" in Casa Pallavicini, Rome, the "Allegoria della Calumnia" which is found in the Uffizi, Florence, the glorious "Nativity" in the National Gallery, London, the tragic "Lamentazioni sul Cristo Morto" in the Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, the "Crocifisso" in the Collezione Aynard, at Lyons, and the "Communione di San Girolamo" of Casa Capponi in Florence.

The famous "Allegory of Calumny" (in the Uffizi at Florence) where Innocence is represented as being dragged by Calumny to the throne of a wicked judge, is by some regarded as a picture inspired by the iniquitous condemnation of Savonarola. Certainly the Fraud, Envy, Ignorance, Calumny, and Suspicion symbolised therein played their parts in the martyrdom of the Friar.

"The Nativity" in the National Gallery, London, bears an inscription that shows Botticelli possessed of the prophetic ardour of Fra Girolamo, and confident of that promise of victory, of peace, and of the blessings of Paradise with which the Piagnoni comforted themselves after the death of their master. It reads thus: "Questo quadro, alla fine dell'anno 1500 durante i torbidi d'Italia, fu dipinto da me Alessandro, alla metà

del tempo in cui si avverava l'undicesimo capitolo di San Giovanni nel secondo dolore dell' Apocalisse e quando il Demonio per tre anni e mezzo si scatenò sulla terra. Dopo di che il Demonio sarà incatenato, e noi lo vedremo calpestato, come in questa pittura." (I, Alessandro, painted this picture at the end of the year 1500, during the troubles in Italy, in the half year after the first year of the loosing of the devil, in accordance with the fulfilment of the 11th chapter of St. John, in the second book of the Apocalypse. There he shall be chained, and we shall see him trodden down as in this picture.)

In the picture of the "Crocifisso," which is in the Aynard Collection, Lyons, Botticelli has reproduced the vision of the Black Cross seen by Savonarola about the year 1492. But whereas the Prophet saw it hanging over Rome, the artist has placed his Cross, which represents divine wrath, over the city of Florence. Penitence is symbolised in a figure of the Magdalen, who clings to the Holy Wood, which she kisses. An angel, armed with a stick, is shown chastising a wolf-like animal that appears to represent the degenerate Curia Romana. Above is seen the Almighty Father holding out the open Book of the Law, while showers of crossed swords descend upon the city.

In the "Communione di San Girolamo," not a very well-known picture, but undoubtedly authentic, is found one of the most sincere manifestations of the artist's

religious sentiments. The dying priest, the patron saint of Savonarola, supported by two friars, receives the Viaticum in his little cell, surrounded by the greatest simplicity. In this picture is felt the spiritual and artistic change which has taken place in the soul of the painter of the "Primavera" (Spring), and the "Nascita di Venere" (The Birth of Venus). Instead of a purely pagan conception we find that such a deep sense of the inner life has entered into the mind of the painter as to make us think of a Botticelli who has become a disciple of Beato Angelico.

Savonarola had waved the torch of a Christian renewal of art, and had imperiously commanded: "Give up the idols, that is, the unworthy pictures which you have in your houses."

II

In his monastery of San Marco a new fervour of artistic activity had arisen. There were the miniaturists, Benedetto, Filippo Lapacino and Eustachio, busy illustrating choral books. As each of the Prophet's wonderful sermons was preached, a chosen band of printers and designers, all devoted to the Prior, competed for the honour of printing and illustrating them, and that with such a rare perfection of art that even to the present day these Savonarolian books published between 1492 and 1498 remain among the most magnificent samples of mediæval printing.

The unknown illustrators of these books have left us wonderful specimens in black and white, all showing incidents in the life of the Prior and of Florence. These woodcuts bring back before our eyes the habits and customs of the fifteenth century with amazing clearness. Among the best known are the following.

"Savonarola sitting at his work-table in his cell[1]." In front of him is the Crucifix, from which he derives all his great ideals for the reform of the Church. He gazes attentively at the page he has just written, and with his forefinger points to each word. His pen is in his left hand and near him is a clepsydra which measures the fleeting time. On a stand near the door lie his cloak and the Cross which he carries about with him, together with several large books and a manuscript. The peace which he finds in this little white cell, with the light coming in from above, is in strong contrast to the feverish intensity of his intellectual work as a man of action, a man who at the zenith of his fame and power was able to sway multitudes. He himself says in his work, *The Triumph of the Cross*, "All eyes were turned towards me, and my hearers hung so intently upon my words that they might have been mistaken for statues."

. . . . . .

A masterpiece of black and white drawing is that in which the Prophet is seen admonishing the nuns of the

[1] See woodcut opposite.

SAVONAROLA IN HIS CELL

but cover their eyes with their hands, obstinately remaining slaves to their bad passions. Amongst them is a monk holding a sow's head, the symbol of his impure sins, and a man hórned like a demon.

One of the greatest Florentine artists of the day is responsible for this grandiose scene, in which can be felt the mysticism in which Florence existed during the height of the Renaissance under the spiritual rule of Savonarola.

These pure and popular interpretations of Savonarolian ideals and faith have not been sufficiently studied by modern historians. They often help us to understand, even better than do the great pictures, what was the religious spirit of the Renaissance in Florence during the life of the Friar. The illustrators chose their subjects not only from the Old and New Testaments, but from the worship and daily life of the Christians, so being thus introduced into the homes of the people we are better able to study the customs of that time.

A deathbed scene according to the Savonarolian idea is shown in a little picture where a dying man is comforted in his last agony by a Dominican friar who withstands the Devil. A curious figure of Death is seen seated at the end of the bed, gazing intently at the sick man as if impatient to carry away his departing soul. Behind the head of the bed are three devils, one of whom reads out of hell's ledger the sins committed by the dying man. On the left, a woman, his wife,

practised it as madmen, fools, proud, who occupied themselves with useless matters, hoping to be looked upon as scientists.

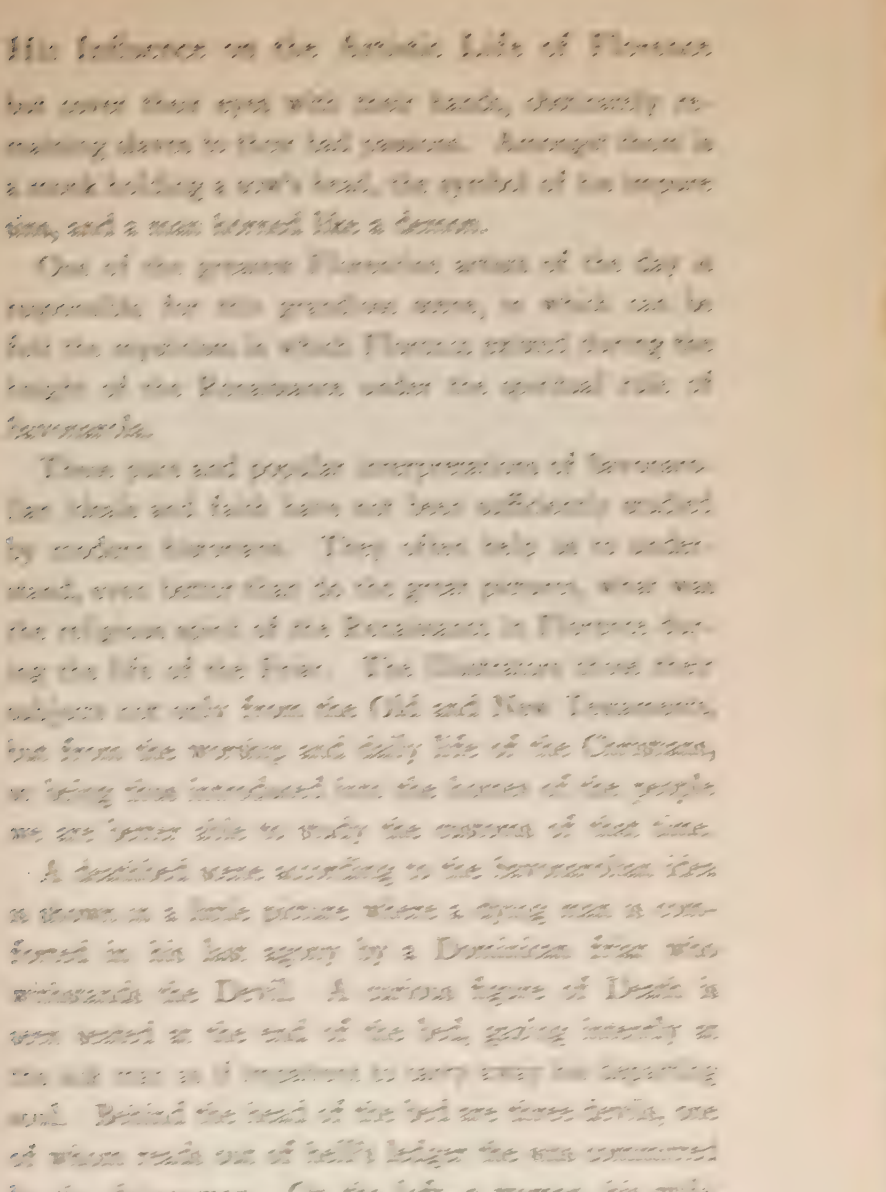
In addition to illustrations of actual historical facts there were also published many which were based on the Dominican legends. One shows Savonarola sent by the Florentines as ambassador to the Holy Virgin. He is accompanied by Faith, Simplicity, Prayer, and Patience, and there comes suddenly to obstruct his path the Devil disguised as a hermit. This imaginary journey is described in the *Compendio di Rivelazione.*

One of the most wonderful illustrations is that showing the vision which Savonarola had of a regenerated world.[1] From the wood of the Cross there flows so much blood that it becomes a stream to which repentant sinners hasten to purify themselves. At the back of the picture are seen the three cities of Jerusalem, Rome and Florence. The first is surrounded by a calm and pure atmosphere. Over Rome, where can be discerned the Pantheon and the Column of Trajan, there pours down a rain of fire, while Florence is so placed as barely to escape the threatened danger. Around the Crucifix a few Christians kneel and pray. On the one side repentant sinners are seen walking towards the holy river, while some kneel and prepare themselves to enter the healing waters. On the opposite side are those who will not accept the call to repentance and redemption,

[1] See illustration opposite.

THE RIVER OF LIFE WHICH SAVONAROLA SAW IN A VISION

The Influence on the Artistic Life of Florence



draws a little apart, wringing her hands in despair, while on the first floor can be seen two kneeling youths praying for their father's salvation. On the white wall above, there appears between two angels the Merciful Virgin, who holds the Holy Babe in her arms.

Mr. Humphreys, in his *Masterpieces of the Early Printers and Engravers*, supposes that this scene represents Savonarola at the deathbed of Lorenzo the Magnificent, but there is no justification for this presumption. It is more probably one of those pictures that Savonarola in his *Arte del Ben Morire* counsels Good Christians to keep in their houses, to remind them of death. In this scene the artist has interpreted one of the passages in the Prior's sermon where he advises his hearers to keep in their houses a representation of the deathbed of a man who is anxious to make amends for his sins.

A picture of a procession of Battuti [1] is taken from an actual scene in Florence. The cowled monks who accompany the condemned man to afford him comfort on his last journey are seen advancing, preceded by the Crucifix, and under the hoods one seems to discern the frightened, rolling eyes of those who go with the prisoner up to the very scaffold.

The disputes between the Piagnoni and Arrabbiati form another subject. In this illustration Giovanni Benivieni is shown defending Savonarola to some of his

[1] See woodcut facing page 140.

PROCESSION OF THE BATTUTI

priestly and lay adversaries. One can see the fervour and zeal both of the defenders and adversaries, while close by, the younger men with a negligent, careless air seem to be occupied with their own affairs. In this scene there are evidences that a great artist must have been at work, for the robes are beautifully draped, and the whole composition of the scene displays the highest artistic treatment.

CHAPTER XIV

Hurls His Reproaches Against the Pope

THE year 1497 was both for Savonarola and the city of Florence a time of suffering.

Fights were frequent between the different factions. The Bigi—partisans of the Medici—and the Arrabbiati,[1] those bitter enemies of Savonarola, were in constant warfare with his devoted followers, the Piagnoni. Disputes became more and more bitter and violent. Hatred and revenge lurked in every heart, and an idea of the depth of this hatred can be seen from a remark made by Cardinal Giovanni dei Medici (the future Pope Leo X).

One day while discussing the chances of the return to power of his family, he was heard to say that, should this happen, "the number of exiled persons whose goods were confiscated in 1434 (when Cosimo returned) and the number of those put to death in 1478 (after the Pazzi conspiracy) would seem a mere joke compared with what would take place should the Medici return."

Savonarola, who had formerly preached the law of Love, that makes for peace and forgiveness, now showed in his words and also in some of his actions that his

[1] Arrabbiati (maddened).

mind was undergoing a subtle change. During the preceding year he had preached a sermon to the Signory, in which he had counselled them against over-leniency, exhorting them to do justice without favour. He had said: "Your great leniency is not pleasing to the Lord. You lack the spirit of justice; there is also need sometimes of the hard and cruel part. . . . I say to you again—punish rigorously and severely, for too much kindness is not pleasing to God."

Such words were not heard in vain. When Lamberto dell'Antella disclosed a plot formed by the partisans of the Medici, and all the conspirators were arrested —among them being Bernardo del Nero, an old man of seventy-five, of high rank and great influence—the trial was started immediately and the right of appeal was denied to the accused, although by the Law of the Six Beans this should have been allowed them. They were all condemned to death. This violation of the Law of Appeal was supported by Francesco Valori, one of the most powerful and fervid Savonarolians, and Fra Girolamo made no attempt to interpose and compel his follower to respect the law.

The writer Villari has sought to acquit the Friar of the gravest accusations brought against him by Machiavelli in this matter, but has not succeeded in justifying him in any convincing manner. From Savonarola's own testimony it is seen that in this circumstance he inclined to the "cruel part."

It is very possible that the fact of seeing the Pope defending the cause of the Medici induced Savonarola to take no interest in the fate of the accused. But he ought to have defended the law—even if he did not feel disposed to intervene in favour of the guilty.

At the beginning of 1497 the Piagnoni were still in power, with Francesco Valori as their chief, and during Lent the Prior resumed his sermons on the Book of Ezekiel, raising high his voice of protest against the ecclesiastics and the Roman Curia.

On February the 21st he sternly asserted his belief that "priests and prelates have brought all these scourges upon Italy. It is not God's wish to punish the people who sin through ignorance, but the priests who sin through wickedness. And yet the people must be punished, for they ought not to follow the bad example of priests, who no longer either fear or respect God, who spend their nights with harlots and their days chattering in the choirs. They make their altars into places of traffic. No reverence is shown to the Church." They say "Reliquit Dominus terram et Dominus non videt." They say that "God hath no care of the world —that all comes by chance. They do not believe that Christ is present in the Sacrament." In the sermon on March the 4th he makes this tremendous accusation against the Church: "I speak to thee, oh Church, for Ezekiel speaks to many, and uses words which apply to many. Come here, thou ribald Church. The Lord

saith I have given thee beautiful vestments, but thou hast made idols of them. The sacred vessels thou hast dedicated to pride, the sacraments to simony. Out of lust thou hast made thyself a shameless harlot. Thou hast committed sins that are known to everybody, and each sin is as bad as the other. Thou hast made thyself a devil, lower than a beast; thou art a monster of abomination. Once, oh thou harlot Church, thou didst feel shame for thy sins, for thy lusts. Now thou dost not feel any shame. Once the priests called their sons their nephews, but now they call them sons, openly and everywhere. Thou hast everywhere made a public place and built a house of ill-fame. (Et fecisti postribulum in cunctis plateis.) What doeth the harlot? She sitteth on the throne of Solomon."

Cruder language and more direct ruthless accusations were never used against the Curia Romana. Even the fierce language of Dante pales into insignificance compared with that of Savonarola. He put red hot iron on real and not imaginary sores. Nor can it be said that he exaggerated. For it was against Alexander the Pope that he hurled his reproaches. It was against him that he flung the reproach: "Thou hast made brothels everywhere." Contemporary writers give graphic descriptions of the Pope's habits, and also those of his relations, and other ecclesiastical dignitaries. And although some of these descriptions are doubtless much exaggerated, there is still sufficient evidence to show that

this Pope of the Renaissance was totally unworthy to sit on the throne of St. Peter, and to occupy the highest ecclesiastical dignity.

In the Curia together with lustful pleasures there triumphed simony.

Savonarola says: "Whoever has money runs there, where everything can be bought. The prelates sold everything, even absolution from excommunications."

Fra Girolamo experienced this shortly after, for when he fell under the pontifical wrath, and was excommunicated, the Cardinal of Siena came to him and made him an offer that if he would pay one of his creditors 5,000 scudi, he—the Cardinal—would pledge himself to have the ban of excommunication removed. Savonarola disdainfully rejected this offer of the Cardinal, and writing to his friend, Ludovico Pittorio, he remarks: "Far greater censure would I esteem it to redeem it for money."

Speaking of the rumours of a ban of excommunication he says: "Many of you say that excommunications will come, but I say to you that more than excommunication is intended; as for me I pray Thee, oh Lord, that it may come quickly. What! hast thou no fear? Not I, for they seek to excommunicate me because I do no evil. Carry the excommunication aloft on a lance, and open the gates to it!" His attitude of rebellion towards the supreme authority of the Church both before and after the excommunication—although it cannot

be justified in a Catholic, can yet be understood, when it is seen how corruption had entered into the highest hierarchal sphere of the Church.

Fra Girolamo had in Rome an enemy who was always urging his excommunication, Fra Mariano di Genazzano. "I know well," said Savonarola, "that there is in Rome one that strives continually against me. But he is not moved by religious zeal. He hates me because he is always cringing to great lords and potentates. Others say 'the Friar hath yielded; he hath sent one of his friends to Rome.' I can tell you that those in Rome do not hold these views. Had I wished to play the part of a flatterer I should not now be in Florence. I should not now wear a tattered robe. I should not now be in any danger. But, oh Lord, I wish for none of these things; I desire only Thy Cross. Let me, I pray Thee, be persecuted. I beg this grace of Thee. Let me not die in my bed, but let me give my blood for Thee, as Thou didst give Thine for me."

The presentiment of martyrdom became strong in his mind. He desired to follow his Master in persecution, in suffering, in an ignominious death, and this spirit of exaltation made him ready to sustain all the dangers now rapidly surrounding him.

Having finished his Lenten sermons, Savonarola retired to the quiet of his monastery.

Piero dei Medici had again tried to enter the city, but having failed, his partisans were crushed. The Arrab-

biati, who had gained a complete ascendancy in the new Signory, finding themselves so strong, now resolved to wreak their vengeance on the Prophet by arousing party feeling, and only waited an opportunity for putting their plans into action.

Meanwhile, as if the troubles of the Republic were not sufficient, another calamity overtook Florence, a terrible pestilence, with its accompaniment of misery, unemployment and famine. Then Savonarola, when every one was deserting the city, came out of his retirement to bring comfort to the poor sufferers. He worked prodigiously, tending the sick, comforting the dying, ministering to the afflicted, bearing to them the balm of faith, hope, and love, entering into the plague-stricken dwellings with holy words of comfort, and during his free hours and the long nights he would write in his cell, correcting the proofs of *The Triumph of the Cross*, and composing other profoundly spiritual treatises.

CHAPTER XV

The Ascension Day Sermon

THE first violent clash between the factions of the Arrabbiati and Piagnoni took place on the 4th of May, 1497. It was Ascension Day, and Savonarola had decided to preach to the people from the pulpit of the Duomo. His enemies declared that he would not be heard, while his friends advised prudence. But nothing could persuade him to stop preaching his sermon. The Compagnacci (Bad Fellows), led by Doffo Spini, were bent on doing him some mischief during the day, should he insist on going to the Duomo. They had at first intended to blow up both pulpit and preacher, but this idea had to be abandoned, as they feared it would cause a massacre among the multitude of hearers. They then decided to defile the pulpit with filth, to drape it with the skin of an ass, and nail iron spikes into the ledge upon which the Friar was accustomed to strike his fist in the heat of his eloquence.

The first Piagnoni who entered the church at dawn were aware of the proposed outrageous attack, so they at once cleared the pulpit of every scrap of filth, planed its surface, and withdrew the spikes. Savonarola was warned of the wicked intention of the Compagnacci, but

nothing daunted, he left San Marco a little before midday, and followed by his most faithful friends entered the Duomo, where in the midst of the crowd of faithful Piagnoni could be seen scattered here and there groups of the Compagnacci, all richly dressed, and wearing an air of arrogance and pride.

The Friar began his sermon—one of the most beautiful he ever preached—with a cry of faith that echoed through the church like a challenge: "Oh Lord, my God, in Thee is my hope—save me, deliver me. I believed this morning that I would ascend to heaven to be with Christ. But this my hope has failed. You believe, perhaps, that I should have had fear. Do ye not know that faith fears nothing? I say to you, as said the Prophet, 'Credidi propter quod locutus sum.' (I believed; therefore have I spoken.) I believe and have believed, and have therefore always preached. . . . The just will remain safe, when the swords, the guns and the stones of the enemies are brought against them. They will not touch them. Those who have faith are too high for them to reach. Ye who like not good living wish to hurt me. But without my own consent, nothing can ever harm my soul. If ye harm the body, ye do good to the soul. If ye only knew how it benefits my soul to have my body persecuted, ye would desist, so as to deprive me of so much good. Ye thought that I should not have come to this pulpit this morning. Ye see that I have come. Ye will probably say, 'No thanks

to you, for you came escorted by friends.' But I say to you I did not call for this band. And in any case I wanted to come, and I shall come at all times when Domeniddio (the Lord God) inspires me to come. No man in the whole world, whatever his rank, can prevent me when God calls."

After this aggressively courageous preface, he turned round to his faithful followers, and offered up a humble but impassioned prayer, based on the Psalm "Oh Lord God in Thee Do I Trust." He asked not for safety of body, but salvation of soul. "I beseech Thee, oh Lord, to save *me*, not this body of mine, for Thou knowest that it is my spirit which speaks, not my body. Save then, oh Lord, *me* and do as seemeth best to Thee with my body. Deliver me out of the hands of those who are enemies of the truth. Let me be free to speak the truth boldly and without fear. Let neither promotion, nor flattery nor persecutions make me a slave of sin and lies."

His prayer seemed to be wafted up on high, borne on the wings of a soul entirely absorbed in God. He had reached such a height of spiritual fervour that he no longer spoke to the people; he was holding direct communication with his Heavenly Father, and before the Supreme Judge he confesses and justifies himself against the accusation of his enemies. Then, like an eagle that has reached the sublime blue of the sky and of solitude, and cannot go any higher, he descends again to earth. He recognises his friends and his enemies, and beseeches

them to become united and live in peace with one another. But peace could only exist with good-will: "Live good lives, and make peace, otherwise *ye* are the makers of wars and not I, for unless good will is found amongst you, ye cannot have peace."

This truth upset and offended the Compagnacci, who rose up tumultuously and sought to stop the sermon. But Fra Girolamo confuted them harshly, saying: "Ye try to stop these teachings so as to live just as you wish. Do not so, for fear harm befall you." But his enemies would not be silenced. The charm with which the prayer had filled the air, and held the crowd in rapt attention, was now broken. Questions were asked, and answers were given; interruptions took place, confused clamour, insults. In a few moments the tumult was at its height. The doors were burst open, seats were overturned, alms-boxes hurled on the ground. In the din, yelling women were heard crying out "Mercy, mercy," and it seemed as if blows and fighting would take place. Two of Savonarola's bitterest enemies, members of the Otto—Bartolomeo Giugni and Giuliano Mazzinghi, taking advantage of the uproar, tried to reach the pulpit with the intention of killing him, but his faithful guards surrounded him and drove them back. Giugni received a blow in the face from the Piagnone, Corbizzo da Castrocaro. Savonarola tried his best to quell the disturbance. He raised the Crucifix on high and cried out to his followers: "Trust in this, and fear nothing." Then

Alinari

THE FIRST CLOISTER IN SAN MARCO

to his enemies he said: "Have a little patience, for if ye knew what I know, ye would weep." And again turning to his friends: "Have no fear, for God is with us. He is on our side, and there are here many thousands of angels."

Owing to the great confusion the sermon had to be stopped, and Savonarola left the pulpit. Protected by his friends, who bore him triumphantly out of the hands of the Compagnacci, they reached the monastery of San Marco, and there, in the garden, he continued his interrupted sermon, and bidding his followers not to fear, he gave them the assurance that the wicked would not prevail, but would fall into the pit they had dug for others. This Ascension Day sermon was taken down by Girolamo Cinozzi and was shortly afterwards printed and distributed throughout Italy.

The events of the day, however, showed Savonarola that it would be wise to abstain from preaching for a while. He wrote a letter on the 8th of May to "all God's chosen and faithful Christians." (A tutti gli eletti di Dio, e fedeli Cristiani) in which he said that in order that God's work might not be overthrown and the wicked made to rejoice he would say in writing what he could not say by word of mouth. "All my prophecies," he said, "are being fulfilled. First they slandered us, then by crooked ways they have tried to excommunicate us, and having so far failed, they now make an attempt on our life. So far not a drop of

blood has been spilt, because the Lord, who knows our frailty, has not permitted us to be tempted beyond our strength. And as by degrees He increases our tribulations, so will He increase our faith, our virtue and our courage to a higher resistance. It is thus He prepares us for heavier persecutions, so that men, marvelling at our constancy, may begin to believe that we are upheld by the certainty of a better life than this present one, and may themselves begin to place their hope in it. Our tribulation, in spite of the will of those who would do us harm, will serve to spread abroad this light.

"We thank God that in these days, days utterly without faith, we have been chosen to suffer in its defence. And as ye have been deprived of the Word of God through the fault of those who raised a scandal on the very day appointed by God for His disciples to go and preach to the world, pray ye the Almighty that He will once more deign to unseal the lips of His preachers, for what He commands, no strength can prevail against."

This sermon and letter had the effect of exasperating many, and the hatred became more acute. The Signory issued a decree prohibiting any friar preaching in Florence, and in a secret conference they even went so far as to speak of the desirability of banishing Savonarola. The fear, however, of rousing the powerful Piagnoni prevented them putting this desire into effect.

Fra Mariano da Genazzano, who had been one of the

chief instigators of the Medicean plot, had fled to Rome, and frequently preached in the presence of the Pope against Savonarola, whom he described as "an instrument of the Devil, and the ruin of the people of Florence." Alexander, thus incited by Mariano, was furious when he heard of Savonarola's sermons; so the Prior, hoping to appease the Pope, sent him a letter dated May the 22nd, in which he tried to warn him against listening to calumniators, and protesting anew his fidelity to the Vicar of Christ, declared his respect for the dogmas of the Church; adding that very shortly His Holiness would be able to find this was true, if he would read his book, *The Triumph of the Cross*, about to be published.

But in the meantime a Brief of excommunication against Savonarola had been despatched from Rome. It was sent by the Pope in the form of a circular letter to the "Serviti" friars of the Santissima Annunziata and other convents.

In this way the first fatal die was cast in that great Christian tragedy of the Renaissance which was to cost Savonarola his life.

CHAPTER XVI

Sentence of Excommunication

THOSE who consider Savonarola as being to some extent a precursor and asserter of the religious ideas of the Lutheran reform are grievously deceived. They cannot have read the great work of Savonarola, *Il Trionfo della Croce*, which became one of the books of instruction adopted by the "Congregazione di Propaganda Fide." In this book Savonarola gives us an exposition and a defence of Catholicism, which he seals with the following words: "According to St. John there must be one fold and one Shepherd, yet, although Christ in heaven is the true and sole head of the Church, He has left St. Peter as His representative upon earth, saying to him: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build My Church, and I will give unto thee the keys of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven.' Nor can these words apply to Peter only, for inasmuch as God has promised that the Church shall endure to the end of the world, so must these words apply to Peter and to his successors. Wherefore it is manifest that all the faithful should be united under the Pope, as Supreme Head

of the Roman Church, the Mother of all other churches, and he who departs from the doctrine of the Roman Church departs from Christ."

Savonarola could not be more explicit in this orthodox declaration of his religious faith. Villari recognises this, and also adds that Savonarola frequently accused the clergy of not believing in transubstantiation, and also insisted more than once both in his writings and sermons that faith without works is dead.

These views are totally opposed to those held by the Protestants of the Lutheran reform. Again Villari justly observes: "His attacks were never directed in the slightest degree against the dogmas of the Roman Church, but solely against those who corrupted them. He had an enthusiastic respect and reverence for religion, but he did fiercely combat the papal and clerical abominations by which its safety was imperilled."

Savonarola's ideas, to those who judge them from a doctrinal point of view, appear to have been on the same line as those of San Pier Damiani, Dante and Catherine of Siena. But between his conduct and that of Catherine, who boldly admonished the Avignon Pope, there was a great difference.

Savonarola was so dominated by his prophetic zeal that he lived more in the spiritual atmosphere of the ancient Jews than in that of the evangelical teachings of the Apostles and great Christian saints.

He seemed more ready to give heed to the spirit of

the ancient law than to the gentleness of the new dispensation. Even Love, upon which he so often insists in his sermons, and which St. Paul places so high, does not in Savonarola's sermons attain the strength and humanity of that "Charity" spoken of by the Apostles. Savonarola's conception of the God of Love is that of the prophet Hosea, who sees in the Almighty a most stern, severe Father, chastising His guilty son, but ready to receive him with open arms after the punishment, when he has repented. Like the ancient prophets, Savonarola accuses, threatens, and condemns the sinner in order to absolve him later. St. Catherine, when writing to the unworthy prelates of the day, did so with a stern frankness of speech but with "bowels of mercy"; Savonarola with the bad prelates of his day uses slighting, contemptuous violence of speech. This difference of attitude explains why the saintly Catherine gathered the sweet fruits of her charity, while the Prophet, too often, gathered fruits of ashes and poison.

St. Catherine crossed triumphantly over a bridge of Love which she herself had built, and on this the Pope met her. Savonarola frequently smashed the bridges between him and Rome, remaining on the brink of the abyss into which he was eventually bound to fall.

The sentence of excommunication on the rebel monk was put into effect with great solemnity on the 18th of June. The rite was performed in the Church of the Duomo, where his fame still seemed to resound

in the vast nave. Four symbolic candles gave out their feeble light, and after the officiating priest had pronounced the papal condemnation before the high altar, these were put out and thrown on the ground. Representatives of all the Florentine clergy were present at this sad ceremony, the friars of Santa Croce, of Santa Maria Novella, of Santo Spirito, the Monaci Neri, the Zoccolanti and a vast multitude of the people. The promulgation of the excommunication, which corresponded in the Church to the degradation of an officer in the army, disturbed profoundly the minds of the Florentines.

Fra Girolamo began at once to take measures to defend himself. On the very next day, the 19th, he wrote his *Epistle against Surreptitious Excommunications,* addressed to "all Christians beloved of God." Among other things he says: "This excommunication is not valid either before God or man, for it has been based on false reasons and accusations which have been invented by our enemies. I have always submitted, and now also do submit myself to the authority of the Church, and my obedience will never falter. But no one is obliged to obey any command which is contrary to Charity and to the Law of God, for if that be so, our superiors do no longer represent God." In the second letter *Contra sententiam excommunicationis,* he started to prove by quotations from Gerson that "a Christian does not sin if he seeks to escape from un-

just excommunications, for unjust sentences of this kind are nothing but violence, and the law of nature teaches us that we should repulse them with force."

This was an open declaration of war on the Pope, an indication of the path which he followed later on, when he appealed from the Pope to the Council and to the heads of the Catholic nations. He now entered resolutely and boldly on the battlefield, but on this field Alexander VI awaited him.

Savonarola could see that his followers were diminishing in numbers and his prestige and influence lessening, in spite of all the efforts that he had made for so many years, for a reform of the Church—of Italy—and of the people of Florence. While the heart of the excommunicated priest was heavy, and the clouds of discomfort were thickening all around him, there arrived quite suddenly from Rome news of a horrible crime, a crime which had filled the Vatican with confusion and which seemed like a warning from heaven. The Duke of Gandia, the Pope's eldest and best beloved son, was killed by an unknown assassin during the night, and his body thrown into the Tiber. The Pope was beside himself with grief and horror. He remained shut up in his rooms for two days, and would neither listen nor speak to anybody. On the morning of June the 19th he called together the Cardinals of the Curia and made them a speech. His faithful chronicler, Cardinal Ascanio Sforza, brother of the Duke of Milan, has left us a

résumé of it. The Pope began by speaking of the "immense love which he bore to his murdered son. It was a love greater than any which he had for everything else in the world." Then he confessed that now he "had neither flesh, blood, relations, nor affections. He no longer cared for any human thing, and he was firmly determined to recognise this visitation as coming from the Lord God. He now intended to pay every attention to the Christian religion, to the honour of the Holy See, and to his office of a good Pope. He would not desire or seek anything that was not just, honest and holy, either from princes or from the Sacred College. He would order and command his Lord Cardinals not to give consent or obedience to anything which was not good and holy, nor to accede to any requests which were not lawful and honest."

While suffering from the terrible disaster which had overtaken him, the Pontiff acknowledged his faults, repudiated his vices, and showed himself ready to reform, not only his personal life, but also his ecclesiastical life. He promised to "attend with the greatest diligence to the reformation of the Church, and to the order of his temporal state, so that it might be maintained in peace and quietness, and not give occasion for any scandal." And he did not simply promise, but started to act at once. He nominated a Commission composed of six Cardinals—Oliviero Carafa, Bishop of Naples; Giorgio Costa, Bishop of Albano; Antonio

Gentili Pallavicini of Santa Prassede; Giovanni Antonio of San Giorgio; Francesco Piccolomini (the future Pio III), and Raffaele Riario, Chamberlain of S. R. Chiesa.

These prelates were commanded to meet frequently in the Vatican, to examine diligently what things were in need of reform, and to acquaint the Pope with the results of their labours. He declared himself to be wishful to get to the bottom of everything. He said that he intended to carry out thoroughly the reform which had more than once been started and left unfinished. But meanwhile—at the end of this very speech —while taking leave of the prelates who were gathered together to discuss the reforms, he expressed his wish that the annulment of the marriage of his daughter Lucrezia Borgia with the Signore di Pesaro should proceed, "no matter by what means."

This proceeding is in direct contradiction to the promises made at the beginning of his allocution to have "neither flesh, nor blood, nor kin, nor affection."

To try to justify this annulment, he told his son Cesare that this was necessary in order to bring peace to his family, and that Lucrezia would afterwards be sent at once to Spain. One historian of Perugia, Materazzo, commenting on Borgia's reasons for upholding the validity of the annulment says that "it made all Italy laugh."

The proposals for the reform of the Church were

very slowly and timidly undertaken by the Commission of Cardinals. They were based chiefly on the scheme which the great Cardinal Niccolò da Cusa had in mind about 1458, during the life of Pius II, and also upon a project already discussed under Sisto IV before 1481. Both these projects of reform had been wrecked owing to the opposition of a majority of the Cardinals. Had they been put into effect, the prelates would have lost fabulous incomes, besides being obliged to change many of their habits and customs. One of the most worthy of the Commissioners was Cardinal Oliviero Carafa. He drew up several plans which would help in the reform of the Church. One was that all those women, bound by ties of relationship or interest to the Pope, should be banished from the Vatican and even from the Pontiff himself. He proposed the most severe rules for the suppression of simony. He demanded that all the officials or ministers should observe rigorously all the new laws. Even the officials of the papal court were not exempt.

There still remain in the Vatican documents which attest to the great anxiety which the Curia Romana felt at this time, for there was a sincere desire to put an end to the spreading immorality, and there is one phrase written by the Cardinals which recurs frequently (a phrase which might be called Savonarolian), when speaking of the Church, and her return to the simplicity of the Primitive Church—*Reducatur ad pristi-*

num statum. It can thus be seen that there was the intention, the good intention of reform—but once more when brought to the test of realisation there was a lack of will.

There can be no doubt that the Pope, under the impulse of grief, was quite sincere in his desire for reform. He was a believer, as were nearly all the men of the Renaissance, but their faith did not show itself in their works. The religious crisis of the time was simply ethical, not doctrinal. Worldly minds, the joy of living, the desire to rule, riches, luxury, all these paralysed faith. Christ, although admitted to be God, no longer reigned over the minds of the people.

But rationalism had not yet devasted the intelligence of the age. That happened later when the ground was made ripe by corruption, and when it flourished so greatly that Luther and the northern reformers were able to make their protest.

Alexander VI buried in a chest the *Pro Reformatione* project drawn up by his Commission, and returned to his irregular life.

As soon as Savonarola heard of the blow which had fallen upon the Pope, he, although so lately excommunicated, sent a letter in which he tried to comfort him in his proposals to reform, and counselling him to bow to the will of God.

He wrote to him on the 1st of July: "Respond

therefore to the happy summons, so that your mourning may be turned into joy. The Lord in His Mercy doth forgive all our sins. I announce things of which I am certain, and for them I am willing to endure persecutions. But let Your Beatitude look favourably upon this work of faith, for which I continually labour, and do not give ear to the profane. Thus will you receive from the Lord the essence of joy, instead of the spirit of grief, inasmuch as all the things predicted by me are true, and none who resist the Lord can ever enjoy peace. These things, Blessed Father, I write, being moved by Charity and hoping that Your Beatitude may be truly comforted by God. Ere long the thunders of His Wrath will be heard, and blessed are they who have placed their trust in Him. May the Lord of all mercy console Your Holiness in your tribulations."

Reading this letter closely it conveys the impression that Savonarola does not so much wish to comfort his spiritual father, who has excommunicated him, as to prove his own authority as a prophet and interpreter of the Supreme Judge. He desires to show that the blow which has struck the Pope in his carnal affections was a heavenly warning of future scourges, should he not truly and speedily amend his ways and help in the reform of the Church, a work in which Savonarola was engaged, and for which he had drawn upon himself the sentence of excommunication. This is the real meaning which underlies this letter, for in its prophetic and warn-

ing tone it shows a lack of true charity. When writing a letter of condolence in a time of grief, it was not seemly to speak of himself.

The murder of the Duke of Gandia and the Pope's proposals of reform strengthened the faith of the Florentines in Savonarola.

They saw in these facts an undoubted proof of his true prophetic mission, a sure sign that he was being helped and inspired from heaven. He had predicted that the Church would be reformed by the sword, and it was a fact that the sword of an assassin killing the Pope's son had made the Pontiff decide on the reforming of the Church. In certain letters which the Florentines Bracci, Bonsi and Becchi sent from Rome to the Dieci, it is revealed that the Signory through their friends took advantage of the Pope's change of heart to try and induce him to act towards Savonarola "with his usual goodness and clemency." A lengthy and spirited correspondence then ensued between the Signory and Rome, but notwithstanding every effort made, the Pope still insisted that Savonarola should come to Rome to be judged. "He will have every security, the Pope wishes to hear him, and should he find him innocent, will bestow upon him the pontifical blessing. Should he find him guilty, he will temper justice with mercy."

A political question of great importance was also at the same time to be considered. Bonsi was charged by

the Signory to induce the Pope to restore Pisa to the Republic. The loss of Pisa had taken place when Charles had come to Italy, and after the French had left, the city still remained in the hands of the victorious allies. The Florentines, on the advice of Savonarola, having remained true to Charles, and having refused to join the League of the allies, Alexander had delayed returning this precious pledge to Florence. He promised to restore it only on the condition that "the Florentines would be good Italians and would oppose any attempt by other nations, especially France, to enter Italy." The Pope in acting thus showed much political shrewdness, and knowing full well how much Savonarola had been bound to the French King, he made plain to the Florentine ambassador that it was his intention to postpone the absolution of the Prior until such time as the city of Pisa was restored to the Florentines. Alexander justly maintains that the Republic ought not to meddle in foreign politics, nor make alliances with strangers, but ought to decide—in spite of the Friar's advice—to follow a strictly national policy, by entering definitely into the League.

The Pope's point of view tallied with the grandiose plan of the Unification of Italy which had been foreshadowed by Machiavelli, and which should have been realised by Cesare Borgia.

CHAPTER XVII

Savonarola in Retirement

SAVONAROLA'S political position became stronger after the failure of the Medicean plot, and the condemnation to death of Bernardo del Nero and his fellow conspirators. But the Pope was more than ever incensed against Florence. The Piagnoni had again become all powerful, for during six months three Signories of the popular party were elected. They, gauging well the feelings of their adherents, had continually instructed their ambassador in Rome to do his utmost to obtain from the Pope the absolution of Savonarola, but his efforts were quite in vain. Alexander VI would not yield. He looked upon the Friar as a rebel and the Florentines as "Bad Italians."

Political and religious questions had now become so confused as to be inextricably bound together in a knot which was tightening each day, and leading to inevitably fatal results.

Savonarola seemed more than ever obsessed by his theocratic ideals, embodied in the formula *Vivere a popolo e vivere bene.* (Live democratically and live good lives.) He looked upon Florence as a big monastery, and his outlook was that of a mediæval monk,

who could not see beyond the monastery walls. On the other hand, Alexander had a modern universal and unprejudiced vision of the politics of both Church and State. Florence he looked upon as an excellent card in the game, a card which ought to be in his hand, but was instead held by a Dominican, and must be snatched away at any cost, by any means.

To the Pope, a Borgia, and a proud Spanish aristocrat, it was monstrous and inconceivable that a poor monk, who said he was inspired by God, should have the power of leading a popular movement against the aims of the League, in contempt of his authority as Vicar of Christ on earth.

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After the sermon on Ascension Day, Savonarola for six months dedicated all his time to deep meditation, remaining secluded from the world while preparing his last works. Besides his big work, *The Triumph of the Cross*, he also wrote a *Tractate on the Rule and Government of the City of Florence*, which was published in 1497. In this treatise he disclosed his own views on political matters, and reiterates his opinion that "were there no bad priests and friars Florence would return to the simplicity of life of the early Christians, and would be a model of religion to the whole world." He then speaks of government by tyrants as compared with that by the people, exalting the freedom enjoyed under the popular government and describing in detail the wicked-

ness of the despot as exemplified in the corrupt lives of contemporary Italian princes. Florence is always first in his mind. "There must be in the city of Florence a good form of government, never any tyranny, for we see by the example of other cities what misery ensues when they are ruled by despots." In conclusion, he said: "There is not in all the world a punishment sufficiently severe for those who try to attempt or even wish to exercise tyranny in the city of Florence, but God Almighty, the Just Judge, will know how to punish such as they deserve, either in this life or the next."

Other tractates were published in 1497: *Lamentatio sponsæ Christi adversus tepidos; Loqui prohibeor et tacere non possum* (when he was forbidden to preach); a treatise entitled *Trattato sopra i sette Gradi della Vita Spirituale di San Buonaventura* (a treatise on the Seven Steps of the Spiritual Life of St. Buonaventura); many epistles; addresses to the friars of St. Mark and other devout persons to comfort and exhort them to live good lives and meet adversity with courage.

Ten rules of Prayer in times of Great Tribulation; Tractate on the Mystery of the Cross; Tractate on the Sacrament, and Mystery of the Mass; Exposition of the Ave Maria, and *Exposition of the Book of Habakkuk* (a prophetic treatise), are among the minor works of Savonarola. During this time of silence he seems to have a presentiment of the approaching end, for he multiplies his activities, and seems possessed with super-

human strength of inspiration, like a flame which burns the more violently just before dying out. The figure of the Prophet in these days of his grief seems to be purified, exalted and made still loftier.

His prophetic instinct enables him to interpret the signs of the times. He traces the Finger of God in all passing events. He reads into the future—and reading, tries to lift up the consciousness of the people from the mire in which they have been sinking. He tries to bring them to repentance for their sins, to purify themselves, to redeem themselves. When he sees luxury, pride and violence triumphing in the palaces of the rich and powerful he protests. He is the minister of the Almighty—the Voice of Justice.

Does not the prophet Amos write: "The Lord God will do nothing without first revealing His secret unto His servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" And Isaiah proclaims: "He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity the meek of the earth, and with the breath of his lips shall he stay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."

Savonarola felt that he, like Isaiah, was sent by God to weed out sinners, and thus cleanse the ground to allow the good seed of the just to grow and flourish

freely. As Isaiah in the "holy seed" saw the people of Israel, so now Savonarola saw in the Florentine youths the men who would take actual part in the future kingdom of God, and a deep conviction urged him to lay the foundations of a new political citizenship for the people of Florence. He saw in the national life a divine order and conceived of patriotism as a religious duty.

The experiences of the prophet Jeremiah remind us of Savonarola. The Hebrew prophet had heard from on high the words: "I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down and to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant." Savonarola had a profound consciousness of having been invested with this authority. He believed himself destined to pour out on the wicked the cup of divine wrath, and he wished to consecrate his life to his divine mission. He would know no domestic joys, he would live away from the world, and enter it only to proclaim the hard truth; and—like Jeremiah—he attacked the religious men, and was forbidden to preach in the temple.

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Having drunk to the last drop the cup of sorrow, Savonarola, like Jeremiah, was doomed to suffer death at the hands of his people.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Burning of the Vanities

ON Christmas Day, Savonarola, notwithstanding the prohibition, celebrated three High Masses and gave Communion to all his monks and a multitude of the faithful. He also decided to remount the pulpit on Septuagesima Sunday, the 11th of February, 1498.

The Vicar to the Archbishop of Florence, Messer Lionardo de Medici, in compliance with orders received from Rome, forbade ecclesiastics and monks to enter into the church to hear the sermon of the rebel Dominican. He ordered the priests to impress upon their flocks the validity of the ban of excommunication which Savonarola had incurred, threatening with excommunication also all those who would not obey. But the Signory, composed chiefly of Piagnoni, being on the side of the Friar, intimated to the Vicar that if he tried to stop Savonarola's sermon, he would himself be deposed and exiled from Florence. Thus the dispute between the Pope and the Prior of San Marco degenerated into open discord between the Florentine Signory and the government of Rome, for the Pope could not admit the interference of the civil power in a question which was essentially religious.

Nevertheless, Fra Girolamo preached undisturbed on the day arranged. There was an immense crowd to hear him. He spoke on the Book of Exodus, but his theme was naturally the papal excommunication

"I do not to-day," said he, "desire to preach, but to reason with you, and to prove to you after certain explanations that whoever regards this excommunication as valid is a heretic." His defence spoken in such terms was a very bold one, for he stamped as a heretic whoever considered the Pope's decree as valid. Probably alluding to Lionardo de Medici, the Archbishop's Vicar, he said: "Thou sayest that I should fear this excommunication and respect it. But my reply is: 'Have no fear of the wolf clothed as the shepherd but have fear of the Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Stand fast in His Truth.' " But after this declaration—which sounded as open rebellion to the pontifical authority—he immediately tried to mitigate and soften its meaning by adding: "Everything which I say to thee I am prepared to submit to the decision of the Holy Roman Church, so that thou mayest believe that I do not wish to do anything not in accordance with Holy Church." He based his own defence on the fact that "Popes also may err in their acts and judgments, especially when influenced by false information."

Then reminding his hearers of the Brief which the Pope had sent him, where he is addressed as a "beloved son," he tries to show that the Pope contradicts himself,

inasmuch as in the Brief he praises him for his apostolic activity, whereas in the Bull of excommunication he accuses him of having preached heresy and false doctrines —*quod prædicavit falsum seu perversum dogma.* When then is the Pope right? With subtle and keen logic Fra Girolamo reveals his arguments to the Florentines. He shows them the political move of the adversaries. He insists that it is the enemies of the Republic who have painted him to the Pope as a heretic. "But tell me," he says, "what it is they want? What do they desire in taking me away from Florence? Is it not to destroy the public good of this city? What do you think they are waiting for in Rome? Do you think that they are zealous for our religion? Not at all. All they think about is the State, and when they say 'State' they really mean you, the people of Florence, not me, the Friar. They have chosen me as a cloak, so that they can hide their intentions by pretending to proceed against a Friar. I say to you that this war should be fought with clean tools."

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The doctrines taught by Savonarola had aimed at Christian reform. The people could already see its results, but now that he had been excommunicated and calumnies had been spread about him and his words were no longer heard, the city was returning to her former habits, so he continues: "This doctrine drove away all bad habits; it did away with the dances, the taverns,

the gambling houses. But see, as soon as the preaching stopped, back come the gamblers, the taverns are opened, and all the rowdyism returns. The doctrine did away with dice and cards; the preaching ceased—the cards return under different forms, and play continues in public. The teaching meant the reform of the children—but when there were no sermons, they returned to their lives of frivolity, songs, feasts and a thousand other dishonest ways. Even there at the Church of the Nunziata, under the eyes of the Virgin Mary, youths and women behave in a scandalous manner—yes, under the very eyes of the Virgin, as if to say 'I do it so as to dishonour you.' So all who consider valid this excommunication, which has brought ruin to good works and has caused many to return to the bad habits of old days, and has thrown down Christ's religion and even cast doubt upon faith, then I say that these are heretics. They cannot be anything else. . . . I have taken no notice of the excommunication, but have celebrated Mass every day. . . . They ask me to write to Rome to say that I have erred. But I would not do so. I have erred in other things, for I am a sinner, but not in this matter, for I have preached the doctrine of Christ. . . . They say: 'Oh father, the priests will refuse burial to our dead.' As for me when I shall be dead I care not what they do. Let them tie a rope to my feet and throw me into the Arno. I mind not, so that my body be found at the Day of Judgment. . . .

They make all this warfare because they hate the truth, and fear that their vices may be revealed. Just like men who go about at night to work evil and seeing a light they fear to be seen, so shout 'Put out that light.'

"This doctrine which I preached is a light that reveals their ribaldry. Oh ecclesiastics, I say to you, that this is a torch which burns so strongly that you cannot extinguish it. Go on, blow upon it as much as you like."

In this touching conversational form of oration, Savonarola was aiming more at saving his own doctrine than at any attempt to defend himself.

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The carnival of this year witnessed the last triumph of Savonarola—the famous Burning of the Vanities. A similar scene had taken place during February of the previous year, but this time the spectacle was on a larger scale. Burlamacchi, who was an eyewitness, says: "The pile of vanities was heaped up on the Piazza of the Signoria. There were stacked on the steps of the pyramid false hair, mirrors, veils, perfumes, books in Latin and also Italian, containing indecent and lustful poems, masks, many costly pictures and pieces of sculpture, but all indecent and unworthy of the new Florence—dedicated to Christ."

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The previous year a Venetian merchant had offered 20,000 crowns for all the vanities which were burnt.

Not only was his offer refused, but a portrait of himself seated on a chair was put on the top of the pile as the Prince of all the Vanities.

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Around the pyramid stood the people who had assembled from every quarter of the city. Having formed themselves into different processions and preceded by the children singing hymns, they arrived in the Piazza. The pile standing in the midst of the Piazza and guarded by a strong body of men was first sprinkled with holy water and then burnt. As the flames ascended up into the sky, there was a great sounding of trumpets and ringing of bells, while the crowds of people burst out in a gladsome *Te Deum*. Savonarola saw with joy his Piagnoni dancing around the pyramid, and when the flames reached the image of Lucifer which decorated the top he rejoiced at the downfall of the symbol of sin and vanity.

During those days he frequently repeated from the pulpit the words "Confounded be all those who worship graven images," and meditating on the lives of the ancient martyrs he secretly wondered if both he and his faithful followers might not be called upon to undergo a glorious martyrdom for their faith.

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Three months later, on that Piazza, on a scaffold built on the spot where the pyramid had stood, the poor Friar was to suffer a martyr's death.

CHAPTER XIX

The Pope's Letters

A RÉSUMÉ of the sermons preached during this fatal Lent was printed immediately in the form of tracts, which were distributed throughout the whole of Italy. By this time the name of the Prophet was a signal of revolution against the corruption of the new Babylon, and he won over multitudes to the cause of reform; but when he called the Pope a "broken tool" he so angered Alexander that on February the 26th he sent the following apostolic letter to the Signory:

"Having received notice of the pernicious errors preached by that son of iniquity, Girolamo Savonarola, we commanded him to abstain altogether from preaching, and to come to us to ask pardon and make recantation, but he has not obeyed us. We commanded him, under pain of excommunication, to unite the Congregation of San Marco to the new Tusco-Roman Congregation, but neither this command did he obey, incurring thus, *ipso facto*, the threatened excommunication, which excommunication we caused to be pronounced and published in your principal churches, at the same time declaring that all those who heard it, if they hearkened to or discoursed with, or held any intercourse

whatsoever with the said Girolamo, would also incur the same penalty. But we now hear that to the grave hurt both of religion and the souls of men he still continues to preach, despising the authority of the Holy See, saying that the excommunication is null and void.

"Wherefore we command you, in virtue of holy obedience, that under safe custody you send to us the said Fra Girolamo, who, if he return to repentence, will be paternally received by us; for we do not desire the death, but the conversion, of the sinner, or at least set him on one side as a corrupt member, and keep him apart from the people; shut him up safely, guarded in such a way that he will not be able to have speech with others, or spread fresh scandals, and sow bad seed. But should you refuse to obey these our commands, then we shall be forced to resort to stronger measures, and in order to preserve the dignity and authority of the Holy See we shall be constrained to place Florence under an Interdict."

Contemporaneously with this letter, the Pope sent another to the Canons of the Duomo, ordering them to prohibit Savonarola from preaching in their church. The Signory paid no attention to the letter, but the Canons, who were afraid, paid heed to the Pope's command, and the Friar, after the third day of Lent, was obliged to discontinue his sermons in the Duomo and preach instead at San Marco.

The new Signory elected for the two months of March and April were in a majority against the Prophet, but the "Dieci di Libertà e Pace," whose members were only changed every six months, remained still in power, and this most important body of magistrates was faithful to Savonarola. The Signory, therefore, did not dare to place themselves in opposition to them in the matter of the Friar. They met together in Council to discuss the best way to act with regard to the Brief which the former Signory had ignored. Opinions were divided. So their reply was couched in vague terms. It was announced to the Pope that the Dominican had withdrawn to San Marco in sign of obedience, and the message ends thus: "We cannot obey the command of Your Holiness, not only because we should be acting unworthily towards our Republic, and unjustly towards a man who has deserved well of his country, but also because, if willing, we could not do so without causing grave discord and danger among the people, so great is the favour and confidence that the Friar has won from them by his integrity.

"It grieves us greatly that Your Holiness has turned your heart against us through these matters, and that you now deprive us of the hopes you formerly held out as regards the material welfare of our Republic. We shall nevertheless always maintain, as we have hitherto maintained, our fidelity to the Church and the Catholic Faith, declaring, however, that the well-being

of our Republic is nearer to our hearts than the convenience of others."

This reply of the Signory, enemies of Savonarola, is the highest possible witness of his probity, and the esteem in which he was held by the Florentines. It gives also a most convincing proof of their bad faith, for a little later, in the trial which ensued, they condemned him to death.

When on March the 7th the Orators of the Republic presented this letter to the Pope, he was beside himself with rage, and it was only for fear of political consequences that he curbed his violence. He wrote a second letter on March the 9th, to the "Priori della Libertà" and to the "Vessilifero della Giustizia," couched in severe but courteous terms, saying that what he, "as Vicar of Christ condemned, was not the good which Savonarola might have done, but his stubborn obstinacy and pride. So stubborn was he that not only did he consider his excommunication null and void, but preferred to be driven to hell by God rather than ask for absolution. The Signory ought not to permit such poisonous doctrine to be diffused among the people. The Florentines must not believe that the Pope could allow himself to be influenced by any persons who were evilly disposed against the Friar. Nor must they think that when God said to St. Peter 'Feed my sheep,' he made any exception in the case of Savonarola. But at the same time he, who denied the pontifical authority of

being able to bind and to loose, cut himself adrift from Christ by his own act. He did not intend to write to them further; but let them see to it that his orders were promptly obeyed—otherwise Florence would be placed under an Interdict.

"Above all else he, the Pope, had mostly at heart the peace and safety of Italy. This Fra Girolamo with his preaching was threatening to disturb; so an end must be put to it."

Scarcely had this papal Brief reached Florence when another Council was summoned to deliberate on the reply that should be sent to Rome. The meeting took place in an atmosphere saturated with passion. Voices of admirers and voices of adversaries could be heard discussing the situation. Thus speaks Messer Enea della Stufa, a Piagnone: "When all Italy was against us God saved us. Why, then, should we leave the safe road, shown to us by the Friar's sermons, and walk out on a path which is uncertain? The Pope is an authority on things spiritual, but not on things temporal. It would not be to our dignity to act as his executors and turn-keys. All this trouble is the work of potentates, and if you give in, the Pope will ask still more dishonest things from you. These gentlemen on my bench are not afraid of the Interdict. We believe that even were it imposed, the trade of the city would continue as usual, and we should see bales of wool being packed and unpacked everywhere as we do at present."

The next to speak was an adversary of Savonarola, Giulio Gondi, chief of the Arrabbiati. His contention was that Messer Enea della Stufa would have spoken differently had he anything to lose. "The gentlemen on my bench," he says, "desire to accede to the Pope's request and to vote for suspending the preaching of the sermons. Must we put ourselves against everybody? The Interdict would cause grievous harm. Many have already stopped exporting their goods to Naples and other towns. . . . I, who have sent my wine not only throughout Italy, but also to other countries, I know that once the Interdict is imposed upon us my obligations with my business men cannot be met. We shall be pillaged and robbed on all sides."

Such were the feelings of the assembly on that day! Impossible to come to any decision.

Bonsi, Florentine ambassador in Rome, was greatly perturbed. He had hitherto been a warm admirer and follower of Savonarola. Now, however, intimidated by the threats of the Pontiff and by an attempt on his own life, he changed both his faith and his admiration. He, with several other Florentines, took sides against the Prophet, and acted a coward's part. On March the 16th he wrote a letter to the Dieci. Having said that matters were now at a deadlock as regards Savonarola, he begged to be recalled to Florence and relieved of his post as ambassador. "Your Signory can well imagine my position here, which is full of danger. And how much

greater the danger when the Interdict is imposed! I therefore humbly beg your Signory to be pleased to recall me without delay from so many dangers, also bearing in mind the public disgrace which may ensue. I beg of you to take into consideration my weak state, and also the condition in which Florence will soon find herself." The Signory delayed and shuffled so much that the Pope, becoming impatient, threatened not only the Interdict, but also that he would imprison all the Florentine merchants found in Rome, and confiscate their goods. These merchants wrote the most desperate letters to the Signory, pointing out the perils to which they were exposed.

Finally Bonsi received a letter from the Dieci dated March the 18th. It announced that the Friar had been commanded to abstain from preaching. The Pope, through Bonsi, gave the Dieci to understand that he was only partially satisfied, and that he expected the Signory to reply directly to his demand. He was grieved to find that they still permitted the other priests of San Marco to continue preaching, for these priests also spoke against the Holy See. The Signory's reply, to the grief of the Pope, was to the effect that they knew nothing of the sermons preached by these priests against His Holiness. This, however, was not true, for many of the friars—Fra Domenico Buonvicini, Fra Mariano Ughi and several others, preached openly in the perfect Savonarolian style against both the Pope and the Roman

Curia. Alexander, in face of this conduct on the part of the Signory, had every reason to mistrust them, and in his heart he decided to conquer at all costs the tenacious champion of the popular government who opposed himself to the "League of Italian Princes."

CHAPTER XX

Savonarola is Forsaken by the Florentines

SAVONAROLA'S Star of Destiny was on the wane, his popularity declining, and his influence threatened with disaster.

While the Signory and the Pope were engaged in their diplomatic negotiations, the Friar still continued to thunder forth denunciations against Rome. But the arrows which he sent forth were shattered, for they struck against the rock of the Borgian Pope's will. It was in vain that the prophet tried to uplift the minds of the Florentines to heaven, to a true conception of faith. The wicked were stronger than the good. "Look," he says, "at the good and just. They are not able to agree together to make a good impression, but the wicked, although each one tries to get the better of the other, yet, if they want to do anything big, they would sell themselves to the very Devil to do it, and use their money and every possible means to bring it about, and this they do because they have a deeper affection for wickedness than have the good for goodness. They have made up their minds and also sworn, that even should miracles be performed, they would not believe in them, but would say: 'It is the work of the

Devil.' They have resolved not to believe. They have made a solemn declaration, a will and testament, that they will dedicate themselves to do evil. You good people, should you not make a testament to yield yourselves a thousand times for Christ? Where is the courage of the martyrs?"

Savonarola felt that these people (among whom he believed there were still some who were devoted to him) were vacillating, that they no longer possessed that heroic faith, that faith which can remove mountains. He continues: "Kill this Friar as often as you please, but the doctrine will remain. I therefore say that this doctrine is your salvation, but it is not the Will of God that I preach against your wishes. Christ said to His Apostles that if the Jews refused to hear them, they should 'shake off the dust from their feet, and leave that city.' Do with me whatever you wish, send me wherever you desire, I shall go, but I shall always preach this doctrine. Were my head on the block, even then I could not keep silent; wherever I am I shall preach the Truth."

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The saddest tragedy in the lives of great men, the forsaking of them in the hour of peril by those friends in whom they have placed their hopes—now overtook Savonarola.

He had lived for eight years with the Florentines, dedicating himself to their spiritual needs, and to the

defence of the Republic. He had served his fellow citizens with all the strength of his great intelligence and his loving heart, making the greatest sacrifices for them. He had believed that Florence, fired by his faith, would have been able to start the movement for a Christian revival, for a reform of the Church, not only throughout Italy, but throughout the entire world. And now this people, so immensely loved and benefited by him, drew themselves apart, condemning him to silence.

On the evening of March the 17th he had preached in San Marco to a small number of pious women. He had told them that he had a presentiment that he would not be able to do this again, for the Signory were discussing the reply they should send to the Pope. Scarcely had he ended his discourse when there arrived the order from the Signory that he was to stop preaching. The poor women when they were told wept. They loved him. He was their spiritual guide. He prayed to God: "Oh Lord, we pray not for tranquillity, nor that our tribulations may cease; we pray for Thy spirit. We pray for Thy Love. Give to us, Oh Lord, strength and grace to overcome adversity. We would that Thy Love triumph over the whole earth. Thou seest that the wicked become worse and worse. They are incorrigible. Oh Lord, stretch forth Thy Hand. Put forth Thy Power; for tears are all that remain to us."

The poor distracted women had felt his words echoing in their own hearts. They all felt as if it were their own son who was thus betrayed; and like the faithful band at the foot of Calvary, they suffered the agony of seeing their beloved Master abandoned by all those to whom he had been a tender loving friend.

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The order, although not unexpected, was a tremendous blow to Fra Girolamo.

The following day, speaking for the last time from the pulpit of San Marco, he announced to the people the measures which had been taken to prevent his preaching. "Yesterday, three hours after sunset there came hither a messenger from those who rule over us. They begged me for many reasons to preach no more. I said: 'Do you come from your masters?' 'Yes,' they replied. 'Then I also must consult my Master,' I said, 'and tomorrow you shall have your reply.' And now here in this place I make my answer. The Lord has heard and yet has not heard your prayers. He has heard them, inasmuch as I shall abstain from preaching, but He has not granted your prayers as regards your safety. There is bad news coming to Florence. Misfortunes will overwhelm her. You fear the Pope's Interdict. Let me tell you that the Lord will lay one upon you which will cost the wicked both life and substance. We shall through our prayers do that which we are unable to do through preaching. We exhort all

good men to prayer. Oh Lord, I pray and beg of Thee not to delay Thy promises any longer."

This last sermon, his farewell sermon, is pervaded with a profound sadness. On the preceding evening, after receiving the message from the Signory, Savonarola had shut himself up in his cell. He took his Bible and spent the whole night reading about the sufferings of the prophet Jeremiah, who had prophesied against Jerusalem, and been persecuted by the ecclesiastics. "Poor Jeremiah," said Fra Girolamo. "He had to bear greater persecutions than I," and during the whole of that sleepless night the Friar meditated on the sufferings of the Hebrew prophet. His last sermon expresses all the agony of soul through which he passed. He was assailed by doubts, even doubts as to his own sincerity. Doubts which attacked him unexpectedly; which tormented him. To have believed himself a prophet: was this perhaps an error? His own doctrine which he had so persistently preached: was he by any chance deceived in believing it to be right? At the recollection of these doubts he cried out. He made a public and open confession. He was not ashamed to throw wide open the doors of his soul. As if invaded by a delirium of Truth, he cried out: "If I am deceived, Thou, Oh Christ, hast deceived me. Holy Trinity, if I am deceived, Thou hast deceived me. . . . I saw from the start that I was about to embark upon a rough sea, but it was said to me: 'Have no fear; this sea will soon

be crossed.' Had I foreseen everything from the beginning I might have fled, as Jonah did. Everybody mocks at me. I am held in derision by the whole world. I am called a fool. I am said to be mad. I can only cry out that all should repent. I can only say that tribulations will come. I have for so long cried out that Italy and especially Rome will be ruined. I have said that barbarians and foreigners will bring it to pass, but, because nothing has yet happened, I am not believed—for people here believe in nothing. Oftentimes after leaving the pulpit I have thought I will no more speak or preach of these things. I shall now leave them to God. I shall say no more. But once again in the pulpit I could not contain myself; I could not refrain from preaching. The words of the Lord, when I am in the pulpit, are like a consuming fire. I feel them in my heart and in my bones. They burn me and I have been forced to speak. I feel myself set all on fire by the Spirit of the Lord. Then again, when I come down from the pulpit I say to myself: 'Now I will not speak any more of these things.' But again when I preach, my tongue refuses to be curbed, my words cannot be held back. . . . Oh my Lord. Oh Spirit, Thou that fearest none in this world. Thou that art no respecter of persons, be they who they may, Thou declarest the truth to all. Oh Spirit, Thou dost rouse persecutions and tribulations against Thyself.

Thou stirrest the waves of the sea, as does the wind. Thou dost raise tempests. Oh Spirit, I pray Thee be still. But the Spirit replies to me, 'The Spirit cannot be still.' Therefore I pray that Thou wouldest let me have a little rest, to calm this fire which has taken possession of me.

"May I not indeed have been a chosen instrument in the hands of God, the hammer used by Him to strike the consciences of the people, and awake them to righteousness?" Then he exclaims: "Let the Lord do as He willeth. He, the Master, makes use of His tool to further His Own ends; and when He no longer needs it, He casteth it aside, and does not put it into the chest. Even so did He with Jeremiah, who was cast aside, and having been sufficiently used, was then stoned. So will it be with this tool. When the Master hath used it to serve His Own purpose, He will cast it aside."

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These are not the words of a soul wrecked on the rocks of his ideal, but those of a man who, although cruelly disillusioned, is strong to rise above misfortune and strengthen his mind to pursue his mission. No longer can he put any faith in the people of Florence; no, not in that faithless city, in that changeable atmosphere, can he hope for help in his duty of reforming the Church. Where then? Perhaps the Catholic princes would help?

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The democratic government which he had so greatly helped to power; the Republic which he had so boldly defended against tyranny and despotism—what had it done for him? . . . Denied him. Betrayed him. Reduced him to silence. There only remained to him to place his confidence in the princes, in the justice of kings.

He intended to appeal to them to convoke the Council, and to depose from the throne of Peter the corrupt and simoniac Pope Alexander. But, war once declared, he wished to be above board in all that he did. So before writing privately to the princes he first wrote an open letter to the Pope. It is the famous letter in which he says:

"Most Holy Father,

"I always believed that it was the duty of a good Christian to defend religion and redress wrong-doing. But in doing this I have had nothing but anguish and tribulation. Not a single person was willing to help me—I placed my hopes in Your Holiness, but you, however, chose to unite yourself to my enemies. You have given to cruel wolves the power to do me hurt. Nor would you by any means hearken to the reasons which I brought forward. They were not excuses, but reasons to prove the truth of my teachings. They showed to you my innocence and also my submission to the Church. But Your Holiness would not hearken to them. I can,

therefore, no longer place my hopes in Your Holiness. I can only appeal to Him Who chooses the weak things of the world to confound the strong and fierce lions that are found among wicked men. He will help me to prove and maintain, in face of the world—the holiness of this work for which I endure so much. He will also bring just punishment upon those who persecute me and would impede my work.

"As for me, I seek no earthly reward, but await my death with longing. May Your Holiness delay no longer, but take heed to your salvation."

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Savonarola, finding himself abandoned by the government of the Florentine Republic, felt for the first time the deep clear consciousness of the universality of his mission, and saw that the only means by which he could put this mission into effect was by calling for a Council that would depose Alexander VI. He had for three years delayed taking this hostile attitude towards the Pope. He had refrained from offending him with deeds. He had only done so with words. In the vain hope that the people of Florence would themselves feel a religious awakening, he had not taken advantage of a favourable moment, when King Charles was in Rome—for at that time about eighteen Cardinals had proposed to arrest the Borgian Pope and elect another in his stead. It was a most propitious moment for the calling together of a Council by Savonarola. These

omissions must have appeared as grave errors on his part now that he was faced with the reality of the position. But he did not give up hope that his party might still conquer, for he knew that the pseudo-reform promoted by Alexander, the Pontiff, did not deceive anybody—while the triumphant corruptions of the Curia Romana were evident to the whole world.

No longer was it possible to depend on the feelings of religious persons, and on the sincere approbation of devout and timid followers. This had proved ineffectual. The time had arrived to call in the aid of the powerful of the earth. In order to bring about positive results in the world of religion, it was absolutely necessary to enter into the political world to bind together the enemies of the Pontiff in one solid mass in order to strike a blow which could overthrow him.

Fra Girolamo knew how much Alexander was hated by Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere (afterwards Giulio II), who had not hesitated to call him a traitor and miscreant. He also knew that when Charles VIII in 1497 had asked the doctors of the Sorbonne if he could legally take the initiative in the convoking of a Council, these learned men had said that he could. The authorities had decided that Christian princes had the right, in certain grave cases, to call together the Council even against the wishes of the Pope.

In fact, the question of the appeal of the Pope to the Council was always very controversial. Pio II in 1460

had issued a decree in which he forbade, under pain of excommunication, anyone appealing to the Council and not to him. Sisto IV had issued a Bull demonstrating that the authority of the Apostolic See was superior to all Councils. And the Borgian Pope himself had threatened Charles VIII with the gravest ecclesiastical censure should he appeal to the Council which the Parisian doctors of the Sorbonne had given him permission to convoke. Rome had never tolerated such rebellions, and now more than ever was she not disposed to tolerrate them.

The fight promised to be very difficult, and the Friar felt it to be so. Yet, he, with the belligerent Dominican traditions of the Trecento, had quite lately proclaimed from the pulpit: "Our Order has often resisted and fought against Popes who were not good."

But the Friar should have remembered that the experiences of history showed that in all these disputes the victory had always remained eventually with the Popes. Savonarola was not afraid to put his fate to the test, certain as he was of the help of God. So he wrote his famous letters to the Kings of France, Spain, England, Hungary, and to the Emperor. These letters in which he affirmed for the first time that Alexander was an illegal Vicar of Christ, because, besides having bought the votes of the Cardinals in the Conclave, he had also traded in benefices, led an immoral life, and was an unbeliever, were most cleverly composed, as

in each of them he stressed the particular point which he knew was most likely to create an impression on the receiver, and induce him to convoke the Council. For instance, to the King of France he wrote: "Thou canst certainly not be unaware of the many chances for well-doing which have been given to thee by God, so if thou dost not take up His holy enterprise thou wilt receive greater punishment than will the others. Remember that thou hast already received the first sign of the Wrath of God. Thou, who bearest the title of Most Christian King, thou whom the Lord has chosen, and to whom He has entrusted the sword of His vengeance, wilt thou consent to the ruin of the Church? Art thou perhaps ignorant of the great and many dangers in which she stands?" Maximilian he reminded of the fact that the highest and most dignified office appertaining to the Roman emperors was "to come to the succour of a Church in danger."

To their most Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, who had driven the Moors out of their country, he said: "Of what avail your victories over infidels? It is true that you strengthen the outer walls, but the foundations of the Church are giving way, and very soon the building will tumble down."

Savonarola charged some of his trustworthy friends to make known the contents of the letters to the reigning princes; and drafts of them were consigned to

Domenico Mazzinghi, a disciple of Savonarola, and to Guasconi, the ambassador in France.

The letters themselves never left Italy. While awaiting the replies, news came that the Mazzinghi letter had been seized by the secret police of Ludovico, the Moor, who was soon in possession of it. He hastily forwarded it to the Pope by means of his brother, Cardinal Ascanio.

The Borgian Pope was now in possession of documentary proof of the political-religious plot engineered by Savonarola against him, and we enter on the final scenes which could only end in the death of the Prophet.

CHAPTER XXI

The Ordeal by Fire

THE discovery of the letter, coinciding with an unexpected explosion of popular fanaticism in Florence, hastened the ruin of the Friar. The atmosphere was charged with electricity, for the Piagnoni and Arrabbiati had been roused to open conflict during the preaching of the sermons on the Book of Exodus, and the silencing of Savonarola by the Signory had given rise to violent discussions and arguments between the Dominicans of San Marco and the Franciscans of Santa Croce as to the validity of the excommunication. The ancient rivalry between these two religious Orders became still more acute, the Minorites or Franciscans taking sides with the Pope, and the Dominicans of San Marco with their own Prior.

Frate Francesco di Puglia preached daily at Santa Croce against Savonarola, calling him a false prophet and heretic, until on March the 25th he publicly challenged the Dominican to prove the truth of his doctrine by undergoing an ordeal by fire.

A certain Fra Domenico da Pescia, one of Savonarola's most faithful followers, accepted the challenge. He declared himself ready to undergo the ordeal in

order to sustain the following statements made by Savonarola:

(1) That the Church was in need of reform.
(2) The Church would be scourged and afterwards restored.
(3) That Florence, having first suffered terrible chastisements, would flourish.
(4) That Infidels would turn to Christ.
(5) That these events would take place during the lives of those then in Florence.

Besides these predictions there was also current among the ignorant a prophecy which had its rise in the Middle Ages—that a Judgment of God would one day take place in Florence. This excited the morbid curiosity of the basest classes, fanatical and eager for every cruel spectacle; it rekindled the flames of party feeling and gave the Signory an opportunity to take advantage of the Ordeal as a means of destroying amongst the people the high prestige enjoyed by the Prophet.

In ecclesiastical circles there was remembered that in 1063 an Ordeal by Fire had taken place. The new Bishop of Florence, Pietro da Pavia, had been accused of simony by the monks of San Giovanni Gualberto, and to convince them of his innocence had offered to pass through the fire. Having entered and passed through unscathed, he remembered that he had dropped

his handkerchief in the midst of the flames, and calmly re-entering the fire, picked up his handkerchief, which was not even scorched, and emerged unhurt. This wonderful fact related in the *Acts* of the founder of the "Monks of Vallombrosa"—might it not be repeated during the present Ordeal?

There was a conflict of opinion regarding the experiment, and Burlamacchi tells us the Signory sent letters to ask the Pope's permission for it to take place. A meeting of the Consistory being called, the Cardinals decided that "on no account should it be permitted," and they sent a letter to this effect to Florence. But the letter arrived *after* the Ordeal had taken place. The Savonarolian historian remarks: "The Pope feared that should the Ordeal succeed he would lose his mitre, and did not wish, therefore, to give his permission." It is strange that Villari inclines to the same opinion as Burlamacchi when speaking of the Pope's decision, saying: "Of course he hesitated, not being able to foresee the final result," for such a historian as Villari ought not to have ignored the traditional and explicit doctrine of the Church in this matter, but should have recognised the fact that Alexander VI, as Pope, together with his Cardinals, could not in such a contingency do other than pronounce a verdict which was decisively against an Ordeal by Fire.

Ever since the Middle Ages the Supreme Ecclesiastical Authority had refused to recognise as valid these

Judgments of God, although sometimes priests and even bishops resorted to them. The ordeals by iron (*candentis ferri*), by duelling, by cold water, by hot water and by fire were all invented by timorous Christians as credulous as they were ignorant.

The Church instead acknowledged the oath *ad sancta Dei Evangelia*, and the purification *per Eucharistiam* —a most ancient rite, according to which the accused who desired to be acquitted of any flagrant misdemeanour, if not able to do so by denial or other manifest reasons, was brought before the altar, and facing the consecrated Host would, before partaking of the body of the Lord, say loudly and clearly: *Corpus Domini sit mihi ad purgationem hodie.*

Having done this, no one would henceforth do him harm; he would be left in the hands of God to judge and punish him if he had sworn falsely and communicated sacrilegiously.

This Judgment of God had been faced voluntarily by Savonarola, for on the last day of Carnival, while celebrating a Solemn Mass, he had taken into his hands the Sacrament, and blessing the congregation had said: "Oh Lord, if I do not work in all sincerity, and if my words come not from Thee, strike me down now, at this moment."

Now, confronted by the challenge of Francesco di Puglia, he thought to himself: "To accept this lower ordeal, having already faced the higher form authorised

by the Church, will it not be as if I were tempting God?" It is true that the fanatical ingenuous Fra Domenico had accepted it with joy, but Savonarola, viewing it differently, tried to persuade him against it, and to demonstrate his attitude he published a little work entitled: *The Reply of Fra Girolamo to the question of the Ordeal by Fire.* In it he says: "I have too serious a work on hand (he was thinking of the Convocation of the Council) to stoop and lose myself in these wretched disputes. . . . We only exhort you all to live good lives, and to do this we need the fire of Charity, the miracle of Faith; all else is of no avail. Our enemies, the instigators of this thing, say that they are prepared to die. They admit this—that they are their own murderers. We instead have been provoked and constrained to accept, because the honour of God and of the Faith has been compromised. Those who feel that they are truly inspired by God will certainly emerge scathless from the fire, that is—should the experiment take place—which I doubt. As for me, I reserve myself for a greater work, a work for which I shall always be ready to lay down my life. A time will come when the Lord will show signs and wonders, but those times are in His hands, they depend not on the will of man."

Savonarola felt at the very first that to accept this challenge would undoubtedly do harm to the cause which he had so much at heart. He knew that it was a

trick on the part of his adversaries, but Fra Domenico in his impetuous enthusiasm had cast the fatal die by promptly accepting it, and the Piagnoni, influenced by zeal, in the delirium of a blind faith, were pushing him into the vortex. They had forgotten the severe reprimand of the Prophet when, a little earlier, illustrating the Gospel words: *A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign*, he had applied the words to them, adding: "I have preached to you the Gospel; why do ye ask for miracles?"

The multitude of his faithful were now loudly clamouring for a miracle. They all hoped to see God perform a miracle in the name of Savonarola. Benivieni, writing from Florence on March the 29th, says to his friend, Don Francesco Fortunati: "The matter is in the hands of the Signory, and there are so many persons longing to enter the fire, laymen, priests, women and youths, that it is a most wonderful sight. You would think that they were being invited to a wedding feast. Yesterday morning, when Fra Domenico gave out the invitation publicly asking this one and that one, all at once a group of women cried out, 'I, I,' 'May I go? Let me go.'"

From a letter written by Bonsi, the Florentine Ambassador to the Dieci on April the 4th, it appears that the Dieci who had remained faithful to Savonarola had, (probably without the knowledge of Savonarola), employed Bonsi to make a supreme effort to save him by

praying Alexander to absolve the Friar from the sentence of excommunication, and thus make the Ordeal unnecessary. The ambassador, in describing to the Dieci the very interesting interview he had with the Pope, says "I insisted on the fact that it was the Friar of Santa Croce who had provoked the question of the Ordeal, and that I hoped His Holiness would be pleased to absolve Fra Girolamo. But he said to me that I must not think for one moment he would give such absolution, unless Fra Girolamo would duly humble himself and ask for it. Only in such a case would he grant it. And to all my pleadings regarding the Ordeal and every other matter which I brought as evidence, the Pope never swerved from the aforesaid conclusion."

The Pope and the Cardinals were certainly opposed to the Ordeal, but as a question of principle, not because they feared that Savonarola would emerge victorious. Bonsi, writing to the Dieci on April the 9th, remarks: "The Pope and the Cardinal of Perugia condemn this Ordeal, and the Pope marvels that such a custom should have been thought of, and it would be a very good thing to do away with it." But is it reasonable to imagine that the Pope would stop this experiment, as the Dieci desired, and at the same time absolve a Friar who did not desire to be absolved, and who refused to acknowledge his apostolic authority?

The Signory were determined that the Ordeal should take place, for they wished the ruin of Savona-

rola, and the Friar was obliged to accept it, which he did willingly. The 6th of April was fixed for this Judgment of God, and two champions were chosen—Fra Domenico da Pescia for the Dominicans, and Fra Giuliano Rondinelli for the Franciscans. The Frate of Puglia had retired from the lists, saying he would only measure himself with Savonarola. The following is a description given by a man on the spot, the chronicler, Simone Filipepi: "I was present during the spectacle, and I shall describe all I saw, and it is nothing but the truth. On the morning of the experiment, Fra Girolamo, with his friars, said Mass most devoutly at San Marco. Then, being already prepared, he went into the pulpit. The church was thronged with men and women. He preached a most wonderful sermon, which has since been printed. Then he arranged with his friars a solemn procession, and being robed, they went along chanting psalms. The people following said the responses. Savonarola bore in his hands a very lovely Tabernacle, containing the Holy Sacrament, surrounded by fifty or sixty lighted torches carried by honoured persons. The streets through which they passed were crowded with people, many of whom were weeping with emotion and spiritual joy. On arriving at the Piazza, there could be seen on the roofs, at the windows, and at all the street openings, crowds of all classes of people who had come to witness the spectacle. Fra Girolamo with his friars advanced to the centre of the Log-

gia of the Piazza where a table had been placed as a partition, and on the opposite side of the table were the Franciscans.

"Fra Girolamo had caused to be prepared on his side a most beautiful altar and upon this he placed the Holy Sacrament, before which he offered continual prayer, and he was as elated in spirit as if he had been going to a feast and not to an Ordeal. His adversaries, on the other hand, were scattered here and there, with no appearance of order or method, gossiping with the laymen just like a lot of rogues who had no religion.

"Before Fra Girolamo had appeared in the Piazza the Signory had sent a proclamation that nobody should carry any sort of arms, under pain of death. Notwithstanding this order, after Fra Girolamo had arrived, just imagine! Doffo Spini with his Compagnacci, who were 300 cut-throats, armed like paladins, came in to favour the Franciscan friars. But it seems that their real object was to take possession of Fra Girolamo, whom they were certain would not stand the Ordeal. They had told the champion of the other side that he need have no fear; they promised that he would not have to undergo the Ordeal. It seems that their object was to raise an uproar, during which they could work evil, but Fra Girolamo being as firm as a rock, they were disappointed, and began to make excuses, so as to prolong the time until night should fall. They began by saying that Fra Domenico would have to disrobe, in

case he carried some magical protection under his robes. There had previously been drawn up a public contract with the Signory, of all the pacts and observances, in which there was no mention made of clothing. Savonarola therefore replied to the Signory that he on his part was quite prepared to carry out the contract and observe fully all its conditions. Still their demand being so urgent, he finally consented, on condition that they would now be satisfied and not ask for anything more. Fra Domenico was then taken into the Palazzo, stripped naked, and dressed in other robes. He was then reconducted to the Loggia, where he joined Fra Girolamo and the others who awaited the signal to approach the place of Ordeal in the centre of the Piazza.

"A storm which had threatened passed over quickly. The Signory then sent out some citizens and priests to bring forward new objections, while the report was spread abroad by the adversaries that neither Fra Girolamo nor his friar was willing to undergo the Ordeal. This they did in order to have an excuse for the crime which they intended to commit later on, when killing the Prior. After many quibblings and excuses, and night approaching, the Signory sent orders that all should leave the Piazza. Fra Girolamo, carrying the Holy Sacrament, and Fra Domenico with his Crucifix, started on their way to San Marco, when a sign was given from the Palazzo to Doffo Spini. It was the preconcerted signal for the murder of Savonarola. But

it pleased God to restrain him. And the Franciscan friars who were the champions of the other side were not seen in the Piazza, as they should have been in such a great event. And I was present all the time and saw and heard everything."

. . . . . .

Thus there was lost to the Florentines a cruel spectacle got up by the Signory with the cold cynicism of the Florence of the Renaissance, in order to arouse first the fanatic credulity of the mob, and then weaken their faith in Savonarola.

The rumours artfully spread throughout the city that he had refused the Ordeal had their desired effect. Lies and calumny stifled Truth. Nothing now remained except Violence, which was to gain the ascendancy over Justice.

CHAPTER XXII

The Arrabbiati Attack San Marco

ON the 8th of April, which was Palm Sunday, quite early in the morning, the Compagnacci took council with the Canons of the Duomo, and it was decided not to permit Frate Mariano degli Ughi, a faithful friend of Savonarola, to preach his sermon after vespers.

A threatening calm brooded over the city, a calm which was the precursor of a storm. Along the streets, in the houses, the shops, and all meeting places, were heard murmurings against the Prophet. The man who had been the idol of the city is about to be cast down from his pedestal. Love has turned to hate. Admiration to scorn and contempt. His enemies paint him as an impostor and heretic, while the most fearful and timid of his followers accuse him of want of courage. He had been afraid to enter the fire to show them a miracle, and also to substantiate the truth of his doctrine. The Piagnoni, few in number, but strong in faith, met together in San Marco to hear the last words of their master. They are words of love, of peace, and of faith. He declared himself ready to meet death so as to save his flock. He then blessed them, and all

seemed to have a presentiment of the doom which awaited him. In his face could be discerned the sadness of a betrayed man, but not a shadow of fear.

After vespers the Piagnoni took in their midst Frate Mariano degli Ughi, the preacher, as far as the Duomo. They were obliged to shelter him from the rage of the Compagnacci, for all along the streets could be heard insults and threats. From street corners and windows stones were thrown, and progress was difficult. Having reached the church, already crowded with a hostile congregation, they bolted the doors to prevent the incursion of the mob who crowded the Piazza. Loud voices of protest could be heard; and with difficulty Fra Mariano mounted the pulpit, but hardly had he begun to speak when the doors were forced open, and a crowd of people surged tempestously into the church. The preacher was driven furiously out of the pulpit, and a thousand hostile voices joined in the loud cry of: "To San Marco, to San Marco."

The Duomo was soon empty. The first groups of the Arrabbiati who were outside in the Piazza met a young noble named Pecori, who on his way to the Church of the Annunziata recited with devotion his prayers, as he went along the street. He had been a follower of Fra Girolamo. That was sufficient! Immediately some of them rushed after him, mocking and railing: "Oh hypocrite, dost thou still chant thy psalms?" The poor wretch had no time to turn back

before they were upon him, and he was slain on the steps of the Hospital of the Innocenti. This was the first Savonarolian blood to be shed in Florence. A little later the mob of the Arrabbiati arrived in the Piazza of St. Mark. Here they hurled showers of stones on the church where a congregation was assembled for prayer. A poor spectacle-maker coming out of the door to try and pacify the mob was at once killed by a sword-thrust through his head. Some of the followers of the Prior bolted the doors of both church and monastery, while others went to arm themselves for the defence.

Without the knowledge of Savonarola some of his followers had hidden a little store of arms in the monastery to be in readiness in case of attack. When Savonarola saw Luca di Andrea della Robbia, Fra Benedetto, Baldo Inghirami, Francesco Davanzati, besides other priests and laymen all ready armed, he implored them to cast aside their weapons. He would not that they should stain their hands with blood. He reminded them of the teaching of the Gospels. But he spoke in vain, and they were still further strengthened in their resistance by the growing clamour of the mob which could be heard outside.

Attempts were being made to assail the walls of the monastery and the church, by forcing the doors. Savonarola then gathered around him a goodly number of priests, and robed in his vestments went with them in

procession through the cloisters intoning the psalm, *Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine,* while the others climbed on to the roof and threw down stones and tiles on the mob.

The number and strength of the enemy being now increased, they set fire to the doors as they entered the church. A fair young German called Enrico, a youth "as handsome as an archangel," a devoted Savonarolian, mounted into the pulpit, where he had so often seen his master preach the Gospel. From his point of vantage, as if from the tower of a castle, he fired desperately on the mob, causing terrible havoc. The Piagnoni were divided into two bands, one knelt in prayer in the choir, defending the Prophet, while the other fought desperately. Blood flowed everywhere, and the church was transformed into a battlefield. Roars of hate, cries of agony, moans of the injured and piteous gasps of the dying are heard all around. A youth of the Panciatichi, fatally wounded, fell on the steps of the High Altar, and Fra Domenico gave him the Holy Communion. After kissing the Crucifix he drew his last breath in the arms of the Friar, his face transfigured as if by a ray of divine joy.

Night approaches, and still the fight goes on in the dusk by the light of torches, and the flames which are belching forth everywhere. Friends and foes are inextricably mixed, wounding each other with their swords, throwing about the heavy bronze candelabras

as if they were clubs, and punching each other with their fists. So dense is the smoke that there is danger of suffocation, until Fra Giovacchino di Mastro Luca, seizing a lance, breaks the window over the High Altar.

The young Enrico, having left the pulpit, climbs with a companion up to the High Altar and placing his arquebus against the great Crucifix he continues to fire on the mob, and thus defend the friars who have taken refuge in the choir.

A novice, Marco Gondi, stands at the door of the choir and breaks a cross of wood on the face of one of the enemy who tries to enter. Another hot-blooded novice, Giovanni Maria Petrucci, snatches the swords from the hands of the enemy and smashes them like matches. Frate Nicolò Biliotti with a tiny brass Crucifix put out the eye of Jacopo Tanai de Nerli, one of the Compagnacci.

The big bell of the convent, the Piagnona, strikes and sends forth its lugubrious sounds over the city.

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During all this confusion four messages had been received from the Signory. The first was a decree that all those in the monastery were to lay down their arms, and that Savonarola was within twelve hours to quit Florence and the Republican territory. The second declared that all those laymen who did not leave the church of San Marco within one hour would be declared rebels. The third prohibited any citizen enter-

ing, under pain of being declared a rebel. The fourth threatened death to whoever dared to enter the church.

A promise of safe conduct had been given by the Signory to those of the laity who were prepared to quit the monastery. Francesco Valori, although advised by his friends to remain inside, thought he could depend on the promise of safe conduct and insisted on being let down over the wall in order to collect his adherents and return to make a better resistance. He was the chief of the already powerful popular Frateschi, but did not estimate the strength of the spirit of vengeance which blazed out in the city against all the followers of the Prior. When near his palace he was met by a mace bearer, who brought him a summons to appear immediately before the Signory. He prepared to obey, and walked along calmly and fearlessly, while groups of boys ran along by his side singing the fierce refrain:

O popolo Fiorentino
Se tu vuoi racquistare la roba e l'onore,
Taglia la testa a Francesco Valori.

(Oh people of Florence,
If you would regain
Your honour and fame
Your goods and your glory,
Then off with the head
Of Francesco Valori.)

At the corner of San Procolo, Valori was met by a group of young men, Vincenzo Ridolfi, il Gobbo del Nero, and some of the young Alberti and Tornabuoni, kinsmen of those whom, the previous year, he had caused to be condemned to death. They fell upon him immediately, killing him like a dog on the spot. Startled by the noise and hearing cries, his wife had gone to the window, fearing for her husband's life. A bolt from a crossbow struck her on her head and killed her.

The house was quickly stormed and burned, and while they were pillaging the rooms, a little grandchild of Francesco was smothered in his cradle.

The houses of Andrea Cambini were also sacked and burned. Of him Tranchedino says: "He became rich by means of the Medici whose affairs he managed. But he had now forgotten his benefactors. . . . And the hour of the Medici vendetta had arrived."

Meanwhile the resistance of the friars in San Marco was weakening, for the assault was overpowering. Savonarola was heartbroken at the waste of life going on around him, and taking the Host in his hands, followed by his faithful friars he mounted the stairs and crossing the dormitory entered into the library.[1] Here he received the last message of the Signory, which commanded Savonarola, Fra Domenico, and Fra Silvestro to present themselves immediately at the Palazzo, as-

[1] See illustration.

suring them that no injury would be done to them. Fra Silvestro, overcome with fear, had hidden himself, and could not be found. Savonarola showed himself to be possessed of great courage. He asked Fra Domenico to confess him, and afterwards received the Holy Communion from his hands. Turning to the friars, he told them they must not marvel if after so much suffering and pain he would at the end be paid "with the same money that so many martyrs and saints had been paid." But he "is ready to accept any pain with joy and delight for the love of Christ, his Lord, knowing full well that the life of a Christian consists in doing good, and being rewarded with evil."

Seeing some of those present weeping, he said: "I shall say to you that which Jeremiah said. I expected this, but not quite so quickly and suddenly." He then comforted them, exhorting them to live good lives and pray without ceasing.

Fra Malatesta Sacramoro had, Judas-like, arranged to deliver the master into the hands of the Compagnacci, and now awaited the arrival of the written orders of the Signory to have the three friars sent to the Commune. During this time some of the Prophet's friends tried to persuade him to escape by being lowered from the walls. The false Dominican, Malatesta, overhearing this, turned to Fra Girolamo and said: "Should not the shepherd lay down his life for the lambs?" The master, who had never even thought of flight, was

THE LIBRARY, SAN MARCO

so touched by these words that he first embraced and kissed the traitor, and then all the other friars.

During this tragic hour there occurred a very pathetic incident. Girolamo Gini, a young and devoted follower of Savonarola, appeared before him with his head bathed in blood. He had tried from the first to defend the monastery, but had at the request of his master laid down his arms, thus leaving himself at the mercy of the enemy, and willingly offering his body as a martyr for the cause of Christ. Having been spared death, but grievously wounded, he now appeared with blood streaming from his head and kneeling before Savonarola, humbly prayed to be invested with the Dominican habit. With great love and tenderness Savonarola invested him in the presence of the traitor who had so lately besmirched himself with the blackest treason.

Savonarola was in the corridor of the library when the mace bearers and commissioners of the Commune arrived to arrest him. Before surrendering himself to them he said to his friends: "My brethren, do not doubt God will not fail to finish His work, and my death will only help to bring it about, for I shall help you more after my death, than I could during my life. And in any case I shall return to console you, whether living or dead."

Then turning to the commissioners he said: "I commit to your care this my flock, and all these other

citizens." The mace bearers then bound him and Fra Domenico, and took them outside. The strong inseparable friend did not forsake his master, but Fra Silvestro was still in hiding, and was not arrested until the following day, when he was discovered by Sacramoro.

When the two poor friars were being dragged by the ruffians on to the Piazza, the immense mob broke out into a roar of ferocious joy, a yell of triumph. Fra Benedetto, the Savonarolian poet, who did his best to follow his master into prison, was prevented by the soldiers. He describes this awful night:

Non so se tante gride è nello Inferno
Qual fu la notte quando quel menorno
A'Signor di Fiorenza a' quali el dierno.

(He knows not if there was even in Hell such cries and shrieks as on the night when Savonarola was arrested.)

The infuriated mob, surrounding the two Friars, tried to lynch them. But they walked along tranquilly, with their hands bound behind their backs, like malefactors. The mace bearers were not, however, able to protect them from the insults, the stones, the obscene names hurled at them, until they arrived at the Palazzo della Signoria, when they were immediately conducted

into the presence of the Gonfaloniere. The only question put to them was—did they persist in declaring that their words were divinely inspired? They replied "Yes." Fra Girolamo was then placed in a tiny room, the "Alberghettino," in the tower of the Palazzo, a room which had at one time been occupied by Cosimo dei Medici. Into another cell they threw Fra Domenico.

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That night in San Marco the Compagnacci celebrated their victory with feastings that lasted until daybreak. Later they took down the big bell, the "Piagnona," and presented it to the Minorite brothers of San Francesco, as a trophy of victory.

CHAPTER XXIII

Ser Ceccone's Falsified Depositions

THE following day was the first day of Passion Week, the first week of the suffering and passion of Savonarola. He, the restorer of the republican government, the protector of Florence, was abandoned by the people, and defeated politically.

The Palleschi exulted with joy at the hope of a not-far-distant Medicean restoration, and could afford to smile with discreet irony at the anti-Savonarolian fury of the enraged Signory. The latter had decided to act with prudence. They sought to ingratiate themselves with the Pope by the sacrifice of the rebel monk, and in return hoped to receive from Rome advantageous concessions for the Republic. They at once made known to the Italian Powers who formed the League, and who were, therefore, against the Francophile policy of the Florentines, that now that Savonarola was out of the way any likelihood of trouble was minimised. Savonarola, they averred, was the great cause of all disturbances, and now for the future no schisms or upheavals need be feared.

Letters sent by Paolo Somenzi, the Milanese ambassador in Florence, to the Duke of Milan contained an

account of the arrest of Savonarola, and of the feelings of the Florentines regarding it.

He writes on the very day of the attack on the monastery:

"Most Illustrious Prince,

"I cannot describe to you how very obedient the people of Florence are to the Signory in this tumult. The greatest tranquillity exists in the city. This clearly proves that it is this wicked Friar who has kept Florence for so long under a cloud. But to-day God in His great Mercy has seen good to liberate her. Your Excellency and all the Powers of Italy may now be certain that the Republic will no more try to bring the French into the country, for to-day the State has been snatched out of the hands of those bad citizens who followed this ribald Friar."

Meanwhile there spread through Florence the news that on the 7th of April, the day fixed for the Ordeal by Fire, Charles VIII had died suddenly at Amboise. The King, the ambitious young man in whom Savonarola had placed such faith, was smitten down by a stroke of apoplexy, and was carried to the nearest shelter, a squalid hole, where he expired on a heap of straw. The man who was to have carried out the reform of the Church, and to have formed one of the Council against Alexander, died miserably, as the

Prophet had predicted he would, if he did not fulfil the task with which he was entrusted.

His death appeared to the Friar's enemies a good omen, especially taking place on the eve of the trial, when he would have been the most powerful defender of Savonarola. The Piagnoni, however, only saw in the sad death of the King the fulfilment of their master's prediction.

The Signory considered carefully the best way in which to formulate their accusations against the three prisoners, for they wished to crush definitely Savonarola's spiritual prestige among the people. He had performed no miracle during the Ordeal. That was something to go upon, and had already helped to lessen his authority. It was therefore proposed to prove him an impostor. Unless this was done he could not be condemned to death, being a "Man of God," and especially the friend and defender of liberty, so dear to the majority of the Florentines. He must himself be made to retract his prophetic utterances, to confess not only that he had been deceived, but that he had deliberately tried to deceive his followers and the people, by proclaiming himself to be a prophet inspired by God.

In fact, as already mentioned, the first and only question asked him on the night of his arrest was on this point of divine inspiration. His reply had not, it is true, pleased his judge. "Now," thought they, "we must see what can be done with the aid of torture."

What irritated and annoyed the Pope most of all was the fact that Savonarola was regarded in Italy as a true Prophet, and that obedience was paid to him as if he were the interpreter of the Supreme Will. And the Pontiff hastened to offer his congratulations to the Signory for having captured the Friar. He dispensed from ecclesiastical censure those who had arrested and ill-treated the three priests, and announced his intention of granting plenary indulgence to all the Florentines, in the church of Santa Reparata, on the eighth day after Easter. He asked that during the trial they should above all else try to discover if the friars had had dealings with anybody in Rome. At the same time he authorised the justices to employ the torture, and demanded that, having been duly examined in Florence, the friars should afterwards be sent to Rome to be judged by him and punished according to Canon Law. In the letter which he sent to the Signory on the 12th of April, Alexander says: "We learn with much pleasure what means you have taken to suppress the folly and madness of this son of iniquity, Fra Girolamo Savonarola, who has not only deluded the people with bombastic ideas, but has, both he and his companions who have been persuaded by him, dared to resist in their wickedness my commands as well as yours."

The Signory now decided to prepare their plans in such a way that Savonarola could not escape the death penalty. They proceeded to re-elect the magistracy of

the Eight and of the Ten. The present members were nearly all favourable to Savonarola, and this did not suit their plans. It was in reality an illegal act, for the Ten had a right to remain in power for another two months, but the Signory ignored this, and proceeded to the election. Naturally their choice fell upon the bitterest enemies of the Prior, who took their seats with the men actually in office, the "Popolari Frateschi," and these in their cowardice dared not protest against the illegal act of the Arrabbiati, nor had they the decency to resign. They accepted slavishly the affront, so that it is not to be wondered at that they could not raise a voice to defend the innocence of their spiritual master.

On the 11th of April the Commission of seventeen justices charged with the examination of the prisoners was appointed. It was composed of their worst enemies. Even Doffo Spini, the chief of the Compagnacci, who had attempted Savonarola's life, figured among them.

But before this Commission was elected, even on April the 9th, Savonarola had been taken to the upper room of the Bargello, where he was questioned and put to the torture of the cord. He was roped to a pulley, hoisted up, then allowed to fall down with a jerk—causing a terrible spasm of nerves and joints. Savonarola, even in his youthful days, had been a delicate sensitive lad, and as he grew older his health had

become worse. His constant fastings and vigils, and the burden of his ministry, together with the mental sufferings he had endured, had made their mark upon his constitution. He had been endowed with a most delicate physical and spiritual sensitiveness. He could not bear this awful torture, which made even strong men weak. His spirit was courageous and indomitable, but his weak flesh caused him to become delirious during his agony. Incoherent phrases would then issue from his lips, words of doubtful meaning, and these his cruel judges collected and wrote down, showing them to the martyr after the torture. Returning to his normal condition, he reaffirmed his innocence and the truth of his doctrines, when he was again put to the torture, and an eyewitness affirms to have seen him suffer the torture of the cord and pulley fourteen times in one day. In his delirium he did sometimes utter words contrary to his doctrines. But when liberated the consciousness of having denied the truth pained him even more than the torture, and he would cry out: "Oh my God, Oh my God, receive my soul."

One day, having suffered atrociously, and being overwhelmed with remorse for having uttered certain words in his delirium, he knelt before his judges and said: "Hear my words. Oh God, Thou hast found me out. I confess that I have denied Christ. I have spoken lies. Oh Signory of Florence, I have denied Him through fear of torture. You are my witnesses. If I have to

suffer I will suffer for the truth. That which I proclaimed I did receive from God. Oh God, Thou dost impose upon me penance for having denied Thee. And I deserve it. I have denied Thee. I have denied Thee. I have denied Thee through fear of torture." Then raising his left arm, which the torture had rendered practically useless, he said: "Oh Jesus, come to my aid. This time Thou hast found me out."

A contemporary chronicler says that when he was taken back to his cell after his tortures, he was unable to lift up his hands, and had to be fed like a baby. But he would at once fall on his knees, broken and crushed before the Crucifix, and pray for his enemies.

No proof of guilt could they find against him, but the Signory were determined at any cost to find some way of bringing him in guilty.

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There was a certain Florentine notary, by name Ser Ceccone di ser Barone, who had once belonged to the Medicean party, and was concerned in the conspiracy of Piero dei Medici, but on its discovery had sought refuge in San Marco, feigning to be a Piagnone. Now, seeing that the Dominicans were out of favour, he threw off the mask, and said to one of the judges: "Where no cause exists, one must be invented." Such a suggestion was received with joy. Ser Ceccone was authorised to draw up the depositions of the three friars, but their replies were to be twisted and altered in such a way

that when they were written down they would appear to confirm their guilt. For these falsified depositions he was to receive four hundred ducats.

So now started another martyrdom for Savonarola. From April the 19th to the 26th there was no truce, either in his physical tortures or mental agony. The questionings of the notary continued incessantly, and when not replying to these, he was being subjected to the torture.

But not even the perfidy of the forger was able to demonstrate that the Friar was guilty, and to a careful reader of the three apocryphal trials the innocence of the friars is apparent. All throughout, Fra Girolamo confirms the fundamental point of his doctrine: *The Church must be scourged and then cleansed.*

The scourge was in fact used a little later by Martin Luther, and the Sack of Rome in 1527 seems to have fulfilled, also materially, the predictions of the Prophet. . . . The great saints of the Counter-reform did later on cleanse and restore the Church.

Lies can be detected in all the Ser Ceccone depositions, invented, mutilated or twisted from their original meanings. There is not the slightest resemblance between the words of confession attributed to Savonarola and the spirit of his sermons and works. One cannot imagine anything more dissimilar. One example is sufficient to demonstrate this: "As to my intention, and the object of my life, I say in truth that I desired

worldly glory, I wanted to be well considered, to bear a famous reputation; that is the reason why I tried to win renown in the city of Florence, for I believed that this would help me to gain fame abroad and increase my glory. Seeing that they placed such faith in me I preached things which showed the corruptions and abominations in Rome. I tried to induce them to form a Council so that the Pope and many prelates might be deposed. All this I did so that I should stand out as a great man in the Council, that I should have the glory of it, and be greatly esteemed and well spoken of by the whole world."

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All the accusations are written in this style by the wretched notary. And having read the depositions to Savonarola, he had the impudence to say to him: "Is what I have written true?" Savonarola with subtle irony replied: "*That which I have written is true.*" It was the only reply that he could make to the forger. The poor Friar, languishing in a prison, had no means of defence; lies and calumnies were invented against him, and carried all over the cities of Italy. The Signory printed the results of the false trial. The people read them and believed them. They had forgotten the goodness of the Prophet. Incredible as it may seem, they believed all that was bad of him. The fame of a holy man was dragged in the mud. Many of his disciples denied him both publicly and in private.

Even some of the friars of St. Mark, his own beloved spiritual sons, denied him. They who had known so well the purity of his life and the innocence of his intentions, his Christian fervour, his unselfish desire for the good of the Church and of the Republic—they denied him.

Fear of persecution drove them to cowardice. These unworthy Dominicans wrote to the Pope a sad human document. Among other things they say: "Not only we, but far cleverer men were deceived by the cunning of Fra Girolamo. The nobility of his doctrine, the rectitude of his life, the holiness of his habits, his pretended devotion, the advantages which followed his doing away with bad habits, such as usury and other vices in the city: the many events which confirmed his prophecies even more than human intelligence could even imagine—were so many and so wonderful, that had he himself not retracted, saying that his words were not of God, we should never have been able to deny that he was a good man." Having said so much they now disclosed their real reason for this suppliant compunction: "It now suffices that Your Holiness has in your power this disturber and chief of all error, Fra Girolamo Savonarola. May he be subjected to condign punishment, if such can be found for so much villainy. As for us, poor lost sheep, we can only return to our true Shepherd."

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But there was one man, one of the Friars, who remained faithful to his spiritual Father—Fra Domenico da Pescia had been kept on one side during the whole of Savonarola's trial. He was shut up in a dark cell. Often was he brought out like his master, to suffer torture. Often had he to listen to the lies which they eagerly told him of how Savonarola had confessed to being an impostor. But nothing could shake his faith. He said boldly to his judges: "I have always firmly believed and have not had any reason to change my belief in all the prophecies of Savonarola. I have within me a steadfast faith in this, nor should Your Magnificences be angry at this, for this my faith causes no hurt either to myself or to the city, and in such matters each man is at liberty to believe as he wishes."

To the repeated demands of the examiners who wanted to force him to witness against his master, he replied with firmness: "I know no more, for I have occupied myself solely with goodness, and in serving Jesus Christ, King of Florence."

The other prisoner, Fra Silvestro Maruffi, who had hidden himself during the attack on the monastery, tried to save himself even in the presence of his judges. And yet his evidence did not prove, because it could not prove, any charge against his superior.

Fra Girolamo knew nothing, until the very last day, of the fidelity of Fra Domenico, although his enemies

were careful to make him believe that many of his disciples had accused him of vileness, but they would not give him the satisfaction of knowing that he had one true and faithful disciple.

CHAPTER XXIV

Sentenced to Death

SAVONAROLA in this his tragic solitude showed himself truly great. From April the 25th, the day on which Ceccone had finished his interrogations, until May the 19th, when the Pope's Commissioners arrived in Florence, he had been left in peace in his prison. He had three weeks to himself. At last he was alone with God, his Supreme Judge. He saw that the end of his days on earth drew nigh.

At the age of twenty-three he had joyfully entered the Dominican Order. His heart filled with love and a passion for souls, he had wished to consecrate his life to the Lord. Now, at the age of forty-six, he was to die.

Twenty-three years had been spent in the service of his Master: years of unwearying apostleship, of immense illusions, of trembling hopes, of high aspirations, and of wonderful visions of the glory of Christ on earth.

To-day all is dust and ashes! He had once said to the Florentines: "I see war and tumult before me. But at least you, my own friends, you chosen of God, for whom I have laboured in sorrow day and night,

you will be compassionate; you will have pity upon me."

The hour has come—the hour of extreme peril, and there is not one found to pity him. As soon as his right hand had recovered from the effects of the torture, and he could hold a pen, he wrote his wonderful meditations on the Psalm *Miserere mei, Deus.* In these meditations we can feel the dismay of the sinner, the darkness and despair of a forsaken soul. It is a soliloquy which becomes a prayer. "I am abandoned by all. I have offended against heaven and earth. Where shall I turn? To whom shall I go? Who will have mercy upon me? I dare not raise my eyes to heaven, for I have sinned. I find no refuge on earth; for here I have caused shame. What then can I do? Give myself up to despair? Oh no, not that. God is merciful. My Saviour is faithful, full of love and pity. God is my only refuge. He will not despise the work of His Own Hands. To Thee, oh most Pitiful God, I turn, and I come full of grief and sadness. Thou alone art my hope. Thou alone art my refuge. But, oh dear Lord, what shall I say to Thee? I have not dared to raise my eyes to Thee. I can only utter words of grief, imploring Thy pardon, and say: *Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.* (Have mercy upon me, oh God, according to Thy great mercy.) Oh God, Who inhabitest light inaccessible, Oh God Who cannot be seen by earthly eyes, nor understood by any

created being, nor explained by any tongue of man or angel, Oh my God, I seek Thee. Incomprehensible—I invoke Thee Ineffable, Who art in every place. I acknowledge Thee to be the Highest Sum of everything, if also Thou art Cause, for I cannot find any other name by which I can call Thy ineffable Majesty. Thou art Wisdom. Thou art Goodness. Thou art Power, and Highest Joy. Being so merciful, what canst Thou be other than Mercy? And I am so wretched. I am wretchedness, oh God, before Thee. What wilt Thou do, oh Mercy? Thou wilt certainly do Thy work, for Thou canst not depart from Thy nature. And what is Thy work? To take away misery. To raise the fallen. Oh God, therefore have mercy upon me; take away my misery, raise me. Show in me Thy works of mercy. Exercise in me Thy virtue. Deep calleth unto Deep. The depths of misery invoke the depths of grace. Greater is the depth of mercy than the depth of misery. Depth therefore swallows up depth. The depth of mercy swallows up and consumes the depth of misery. Have mercy upon me, oh God, according to Thy great mercy.

"Have mercy upon me, oh God, not according to the mercy of men, which is small, but according to Thy mercy, which is great, which is immense, which is incomprehensible, which exceeds in immensity every sin."

What depth of faith does this agonised cry of Savo-

narola disclose! These meditations which he wrote in his prison were afterwards printed by order of certain devout ladies.

After this confused prayer we see that he had been comforted, for the next text he chooses is from the Psalm *My hope is in Thee, oh God.* In this written meditation he discloses the secret thoughts of his soul; the struggle between sadness and hope, and how hope remains victor. "Sadness and despair have pitched a camp around me, and encompassed me with a strong and numerous army. They have filled my heart, and cease not to war against me with arms and clamour, by night and day. My friends fight under their banner, and have become my enemies. All that I see, all that I hear, bears the device of despair. The thought of my friends saddens me. The remembrance of my sins afflicts me. The thought of my cloisters and my cell torments me. The thought of my studies fills me with grief. The thought of my sins disturbs me, and as all sweet things appear bitter to the fever-stricken man, so for me everything is turned into affliction and bitterness. A heavy weight lies on my heart, the weight of a sadness, which is like the poison of an asp, and a pernicious pestilence. I murmur and cease not to curse God, and I comfort myself in despair. Wretched man that I am! Who will liberate me from sacrilegious hands, from those who fight against me? Who will protect and save me? Who will hear my cry? Where

shall I flee? I know what I shall do. I will turn me to things invisible, and thus oppose things visible.

"And who will be captain of this army of things invisible? Hope—hope will come against despair, and will vanquish it. . . .

"I have prayed to Thee, oh God, and Thou hast comforted me. Thou hast taught me to hope. Filled with gladness, because I have hoped in Thee, I shall never be confounded."

Besides these meditations Savonarola while in prison wrote a *Rule for Virtuous Living*, which he composed for the gaoler of the Alberghettino, a man who was converted during Savonarola's incarceration. There are three pages of counsel and precepts for the guidance of this rough man of the people. Like St. Paul, Savonarola pursued his loving mission as apostle even in prison.

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While the Signory, falsifying everything connected with the trials, covered with eternal ignominy the popular government which had arisen under the ægis of Savonarola, and while the city of Florence denied her Prophet whom she had formerly lauded to the skies, the Pontiff, Alexander VI, followed rigidly in his conduct towards Savonarola the judicial line marked out by ecclesiastical law. There is no doubt that in his heart he did greatly desire the death of the Friar, who was guilty of having rebelled against his apostolic au-

thority. But the Pope cannot be reproved for any actual illegal act effected by him to the detriment of the three prisoners. He nominated two very clever men to undertake the examination of the accused. On the ecclesiastical side was the General of the Dominicans, Gioacchino Turriano, the most competent judge from the hierarchal and disciplinary point of view, being the supreme head of the Order to which Fra Domenico had sworn obedience and fealty. And on the political side was a Spaniard, Francesco Romolino, Bishop of Ilerda, doctor *utriusque juris*, and auditor to the Governor of Rome, that is, to that civil power to which Savonarola was subject in his quality of priest.

There is no trace in any document that the Pope was aware of the falsification of the trials, or that he tried to deviate from the straight course of justice. Borgia insisted for a long time that the Signory should send the Friar to Rome to be tried by an ecclesiastical Court. But the Florentine Signory did not desire this. Perhaps they feared that during the trial in Rome some secrets of State would be revealed which would compromise the popular régime, of which in fact Savonarola had been for years the strongest supporter.

A lengthy correspondence between Rome and Florence took place. Finally the Pope gave his consent to the Signory for the execution of the three prisoners in Florence, and a Brief (dated May the 12th), sent by him to the Signory, attests this. He also tells them

that he had wished, for the sake of the dignity of the Roman Church, which Fra Girolamo had hoped to confound and humiliate, to have punished them in the mother city, Rome. "But," he adds, "having read the letters of the Signory and heard the reasons given by the ambassadors, I acceded to the request of the Florentines, that the friars should be tried and punished in Florence, the scene of their greatest scandals." He announced that he sent his Commissioners to examine and duly punish the rebels, *juxta canonicas sanctiones*. This duty confided personally by the Pope to the Commissioners is proved by the letter dated May the 9th which was written by the Cardinal Ascanio Sforza to the Duke of Milan:—

"The Pope has ordered the General of Santo Dominico and a Messer Francesco Romolino, auditor of the Governor of Rome, to be sent to Florence to examine these friars in matters appertaining to His Holiness, with orders that justice be done to them publicly so as to make clear to everybody the ribaldry of these Friars."

There can be no doubt that Savonarola's open rebellion to the papal excommunication, proclaiming it null and void, and the fact that he started negotiations with the Sovereigns of Europe in order to re-unite the Council and dethrone Alexander were well known to the Pope. Therefore, in his dual capacity of temporal and spiritual sovereignty, there seemed to him to be sufficient reason to condemn to death both Savonarola and

his companions. It must not, therefore, be greatly wondered at, that when the two pontifical commissioners arrived in Florence, and when the dregs of the people flocking to meet them shouted out: "Death, death to the Friar," Romolino replied: "He will die in any case."

The Commissioners had come, in fact, *after* the examination by the Florentine Justices only to ratify a death-sentence already passed. But they also came to try to find out all about the hidden political-religious plot which had been formed against the Pope.

This in no way excuses the ferocity shown by Romolino during the interrogation of Savonarola from the 20th to the 22nd of May. (The name of Turriano is not mentioned by any of the historians.) These interrogations, however, only resulted in disclosing the purity of the idealistic motives that had urged Savonarola to attempt war on the corruptions of the Roman Court, and to reform the Church by making an appeal to all the Catholic Sovereigns.

History clearly reveals that the conduct of the Pope in this matter of Savonarola was quite different from that of the Signory. The responsibility of the death of the three friars rests principally upon the shoulders of the Signory. So true is this, that shortly after the last trial, when the Florentine magistrates met together to discuss the sentence, one of them, Agnolo Niccolini, who considered the death sentence too severe, said: "This

man Savonarola might not only be able to restore faith to the world, if it were lacking, but he could also diffuse that learning with which he is so richly endowed. I therefore advise you to keep him in prison if you so wish, but keep him alive, and supply him with writing materials, so that the world may not be deprived of his learning."

This wise advice was not to the liking of the rest of the magistrates, who replied that it was not possible to do this: "As no one could count on future Signories, seeing that they are changed every two months. Who knows whether the Friar may not be set at liberty by a future Signory, and again cause disturbance in the city?" Then comes the sinister excuse: "A dead enemy fights no more."

Thus the death of Savonarola and his two companions was decreed; the sentence condemning them to be "first hanged and then burnt."

Savonarola received the announcement with tranquillity; Fra Silvestro Maruffi with fear; Fra Domenico with joy. Fra Domenico even begs as a favour to be burnt alive—so that he might suffer a more painful martyrdom for the sake of Christ.

The heroic Fra Domenico, foreseeing his death, had written his famous farewell letters to the brethren of San Domenico of Fiesole. All the Savonarolian historians refer to this most pathetic letter:

"*Fratres dilectissimi et desideratissimi in Jesu Christo,*

—Seeing that it is God's will that we die for Him, do ye that are left pray for us, and bear in mind my instructions to you to remain humble, united in charity and always engaged in holy works. Pray God for us; particularly during the services when you are assembled together. Bury my body there in some humble spot, not inside the church, but outside in a little corner near the door. And pray for me, saying masses and *caetera solita;* and I, as I hope, shall do the same for you. Kiss for me all the brethren, both there and in St. Mark's, especially those in Fiesole, whose names I have engraved in my heart before God.

"I pray you to collect together from our cell all the works of Father Fra Girolamo, have them bound, and place one copy in the library, and another for reading on the second table in the refectory, and chain it to the table so that the lay brethren may sometimes be able to read it."

This is the spiritual "Will" of Fra Domenico. A noble page of love and faith!

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The prisoners' last night on earth has now arrived, and three of the "black" monks of St. Benedict enter the prison to hear their confessions. These are known as the Battuti, and are members of the Company of the Temple, an association formed for the purpose of comforting the last moments of the condemned. One of them, Jacopo Niccolini, dressed in black, with his face

hidden under a cowl, as was the habit of the Battuti, entering into Savonarola's cell, asked if there were any way in which he could help him, and the Friar begged to be allowed to speak for a short time to his fellow prisoners. As the last wishes of a condemned man were never refused, his request was granted.

The meeting took place in the great hall of the Palazzo, the hall which Savonarola himself at the zenith of his power had caused to be built for the Council of the Republic. "Fra Girolamo turned first to Fra Domenico and said: 'It has been told me that thou dost wish to be burnt alive, but knowest thou not that it is not meet for us to choose our manner of death? Who knows if we shall find strength to bear that which is prepared for us? It does not depend upon ourselves, but on the grace of God which He will grant us. We must not, therefore, tempt God.' Next he said to Fra Silvestro: 'I have also been told that thou dost wish to speak to the people when we are on the scaffold, and to tell them that we die innocently. Now I command thee to say not a word; but to follow the example of Christ, Who, being all Innocence, did not even on His Cross declare His innocence.' "

In silence both Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro knelt before their Prior, who blessed them and then left the hall.

On returning to his cell Savonarola was asked if he wished to eat. He replied that he felt more in need of

food for his soul than for his body. Later, he thirsted, and water was brought to him in a vessel which was so filthy that he could not bring himself to put it to his lips. He so loved cleanliness! One of the gaolers, moved with compassion, took the vessel, washed it and gave him to drink. Then he was overtaken by such fatigue that, having no bed on which to lie, he stretched himself upon the floor and asked Niccolini if he might be allowed to rest his head on his knees, which Niccolini gladly permitted. After a little sleep, during which Jacopo says he frequently "heard him speak, and saw him smile," he suddenly awoke and prophesied that Florence would suffer great calamities under a Pope called Clement. (This was remembered by the Florentines when in 1529 the city was besieged during the rule of the Medicean Pope, Clement VII.)

The next day, at dawn, the three friars again met to receive the Holy Communion. Before the Sacrament Savonarola offered a sublime prayer:

"Oh Lord, I acknowledge Thee to be the Creator of the world and all living creatures. I acknowledge Thee to be that Perfect Indivisible and Inseparable Trinity, Three Persons in One; Father, Son and Holy Ghost. I acknowledge Thee as the Eternal Word that came down from Heaven to earth into the womb of the Virgin Mary.

"Thou didst ascend the Cross of wood to shed Thy precious blood for us sinners. My Lord, I pray Thee,

my Saviour, I pray Thee, my Consoler, I pray Thee that so much Precious Blood be not shed for me in vain, but that it may win for me remission of all my sins, the sins for which I ask forgiveness, the sins which I have committed from the day when I received the water of Holy Baptism up to this very present. I confess to Thee, oh Lord, all my sins. I ask Thy pardon for whatever I may have done spiritually and temporally against this city and this people, and for anything not known to me in which I may have erred. And humbly I ask pardon of all these persons here present, and may they pray God for me, that He will make me strong right up to the end, so that the enemy may not have power over me. Amen."

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With this profession of Christian Faith, asking pardon of God for himself and asking his enemies to forgive him, Fra Girolamo publicly separated himself from the people of Florence and from his earthly life.

CHAPTER XXV

The Execution of the Martyrs

ON the morning of the execution of the martyrs, the Piazza della Signoria was thronged with spectators. The Signory had ordered a long platform to be erected between the Marzocco and the statue of the "Judith" of Donatello. On this, towards the middle of the Piazza, stood the scaffold, which was formed of a stout beam with another nailed at the top, forming the shape of a cross. Near by was a quantity of combustibles ready to burn the bodies. In the middle of the platform near the walls of the Palazzo, an altar had been built, upon which stood a Cross and two candlesticks. On a long bench were seats for the two apostolic Commissioners, and the Bishop of Vasona, who was charged with the duty of degrading the Friars; then came the Gonfaloniere of the Commune, Vieri de' Medici, and the Magistrates of the Eight. The prisoners descended the steps of the Palazzo barefooted, and with their hands bound. A friar of Santa Maria Novella ordered them to be stripped of their robes, leaving them only their white woollen tunics. When Savonarola was being despoiled of his gown, he exclaimed: "Holy gown, how dearly did I yearn to wear thee! God Him-

self gave thee to me, and I have always to this very hour kept thee unstained. Now I do not forsake thee, but thou art taken from me." It appeared that until this moment he had not known what manner of death they had prepared for him.

On reaching the platform the Friars were bidden to kneel before the Altar. The Bishop of Vasona then turned to Savonarola and with trembling voice pronounced the sentence of degradation. Being overcome with emotion, he hardly knew what he was saying, and instead of separating him from the Church Militant added the word Triumphant—"I separate thee from the Church Militant and Triumphant." Thereupon Savonarola calmly corrected him: "Monsignore, you err, you should only have said Church Militant, for the Church Triumphant is of God."

The sentence of degradation having been read, they were then conducted before Romolino, to hear the sentence of death. The silence in that moment was intense, as if the people were petrified at the awful scene, and women wept silently here and there among the crowd. But all at once the fury of the Compagnacci burst out in violent cries; the dregs of the people shouted obscene remarks and insults at the condemned, while a mob of boys collected under the platform added to the torments of the three friars by pushing pointed sticks up through fissures of the wood, and wounding their limbs as they walked, strong and dignified, towards the

Alinari

MARTYRDOM OF SAVONAROLA,
GALLERIA CORSINI, FLORENCE
(UNKNOWN ARTIST OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY)

scaffold. Arriving at the foot of the cross, Fra Silvestro was the first to mount the step. The halter was placed around his neck, he did not speak, but his eyes were filled with tears. The executioner gave his body a push, then placed a chain around it, and left it dangling, while he proceeded to execute Fra Domenico. This faithful disciple had wished while going to his death to intone the *Te Deum,* but the Battuti who accompanied him persuaded him to refrain, so as to avoid a tumult. Fra Domenico said: "Do at least help me, by accompanying me in a whisper," and in this way, reciting in a low tone the glorious words, he went joyfully to his death.[1]

Having courageously witnessed the execution of both his friends, Savonarola's turn had now arrived. His face was transfigured and he was so absorbed in spiritual contemplation that he seemed to be already in the presence of God. His confessor asking if he wished to confide anything to him, he replied: "I have nothing to say. Pray for me, and tell my followers not to be scandalised at my death."

These were his last words to the world. He mounted the scaffold reciting the Creed. When at the top, he glanced at the multitude below: the ungrateful people who were so eager for his death that some of them were already holding blazing torches to fire the pile of wood

[1] Translator's Note: Leopardi writes—"Parea che a danza e non a morte andasse." (His steps seemed bound to a dance, and not to death.)

which would burn his body. A loud cry was heard from the crowd: "Oh Prophet, now is the time for a miracle."

The executioner tightened the rope, and thinking to please the mob, began to play the buffoon, even while the body was quivering in its last agony. Girolamo had barely breathed his last when the flames reached the bodies of the executed martyrs.

On the same day in the previous year Savonarola had written to his faithful friend, Ludovico Pittorio, Chancellor of Ercole d'Este, saying: "The patience and long-suffering of God towards sinners manifests His great goodness, and in the patience of His elect can be seen the strength of His grace. If God left not the wicked on earth, then where would be persecutions? And if patience and trials were lacking where would be the crown?"

Savonarola had now received his longed-for crown. There on his cross of shame between his two companions, he reflected the image of his Divine Master. He died at 10 o'clock on the morning of the 23rd of May, 1498, the Eve of Ascension Day.

CHAPTER XXVI

Events Following Savonarola's Death

THERE now flamed on the Piazza the fire of a sublime sacrifice to God. There had been a holocaust on the day of the Burning of the Vanities. But what a different scene! Those youths in whom the Prophet had foreseen an elect people, now sang, danced, swore and blasphemed around the funeral pyre of the former master.

The spectacle was a disgusting one. Stones were hurled at the half-burnt bodies, so that from time to time pieces fell down into the fire. One eyewitness said: "It rained blood and entrails." The cruelty of the Florentine youths was proverbial. . . . There are innumerable episodes in history of the fanatical cruelty of the people of Florence. One of their own citizens, Dionisio Pulinari, who lived at the end of the Cinquecento, says that "they knew no order in their love, or limit in their hatred." "See," he remarks, "how they treated Fra Girolamo, whom they suddenly make Chief of their city, even placing him beside Christ, and in front of all the saints, then all at once they burn him and place him below Satan."

Their fickleness was such that, within a year after the Prophet's death, they even started a cult of Savonarola.

. . . . . .

Having finished their horrible work at the scaffold the Arrabbiati moved away, while certain daring Piagnoni and devout ladies approached to collect some relics of the martyrs—bits of bones, heaps of ashes, and pieces of the wood of the scaffold.

The mace bearers could not prevent some of these relics being preserved, although the Signory had ordered that everything should be thrown into the Arno. But the faithful followers searched the river, and young Gian Francesco della Mirandola, believing that he had recovered a part of the Prophet's heart, always venerated it as "a sacred talisman."

This search for relics became an obsession. Whoever possessed anything of Savonarola treasured it as of the highest value.

One man owned a worn and moth-eaten tunic, and another tunic kept by the gaoler of the Alberghettino was given as a gift to the monastery of St. Catherine. His cloak was kept by Davanzati; a scapulary was held by the artist, Lorenzo di Credi; a pair of old shoes by Antonio da Castelfranco; the cords with which his hands were tied by Benivieni, and the iron collar placed around his neck when he was burned was treasured by Francesco di Cesare Petrucci.

. . . . . .

But greater than these pitiful objects collected and venerated by the most fortunate of his disciples were the writings and prophecies which survived in the minds of his best followers. These caused some of the friars who had at first denied him, to repent, converted many unbelievers, and gave birth to new apostles and prophets who predicted heavenly chastisements on the Church and on Italy, while accounts of his miraculous acts gave rise to the Savonarolian legends, which appeared in the chronicles of his companions. But he has also been venerated as a saint by authentic saints such as Filippo Neri, Catherine de Ricci, Colomba da Rieti, and even by a Pope—Benedict XIV.

This veneration for Savonarola grew in an atmosphere which was filled with passion. The loves and hatreds which accompanied him in life continued for centuries after his death. In vain did his enemies strive to kill him in the hearts of his followers by persecutions and the powerful weapon ridicule.

The Signory had at first thought of pulling down the monastery of San Marco, fearing that Savonarola's influence might still be clinging even to the structure.

His sermons and writings, even *The Triumph of the Cross*, were at first forbidden to be read under pain of death, but after a while the Pope was constrained to withdraw the prohibition, except in the case of certain particular sermons. Many books were burnt; and many

were sold by the Compagnacci as refuse, but these were secretly bought back by the disciples.

Caricatures, libels, and indecent songs were for a while published in order to try and tarnish the name of Savonarola. Simone Filipepi relates in his chronicles that: "A certain villainous painter nicknamed 'L'Arghetto' depicted on a large quantity of fanlights three friars being hanged, and writing above them words of contempt went about the city to sell them to the enemies of Savonarola." Every opportunity was taken to ridicule his memory. When on the Eve of St. John every tradesman decorated his shop, a certain Schleggia placed outside his a large living owl dressed up as a Dominican, and above his head a lighted candle, bearing the words: "This is the true light."

Meanwhile great artists like Sandro Botticelli, Fra Bartolomeo, Michelangelo, Lorenzo di Credi were reviving in their works the religious spirit of the Savonarolian faith. Bartolomeo della Porta in the figure of San Pietro Martire even copied the features of Savonarola.[1] Never was there seen in Florence a greater and fiercer contrast of opinion about the memory of any man. Many preachers spoke in the churches against his doctrine; ribald songs were composed and were taught by the Palleschi and Arrabbiati to the boys and girls who sang them outside the doors of their houses on summer evenings. The Psalm *Ecce quam bonus*,

[1] See illustration facing p. 258.

which the Father was in the habit of reciting with such fervour and devotion, was taken up by the prostitutes in the brothels, and sung with ironical and obscene jokes. The mountebanks and charlatans sold an infamous libel at the fairs and markets, shouting: "All who would read about the life and the wickedness of that rogue, Fra Girolamo, come and buy."

On the morning that San Marco was re-opened to the public, there was found fixed on the door of the Martello a dead donkey, that filled the Piazza with its stench, and on Christmas night the Compagnacci had let loose into the Duomo a donkey, which they made to run about the sacred edifice in mocking commemoration of the famous preacher. Amongst the most bitter enemies of the memory and cult of Savonarola were the heads of the Dominican Order who were obsequiously obedient to the commands of the Curia Romana.

Il Turriano and afterwards Francesco Mei, procurators of the Dominicans, had issued strict orders to all the friars of the Tuscan Congregation that Fra Girolamo's name was never to be mentioned either for good or evil. And as if this were not sufficient, they ordered that all the pictures and relics of Savonarola which might be in the monastery were to be confiscated. The friars of San Marco were forbidden to chant the Psalm *Ecce quam bonus*, to recite the Matutino della Virgine, and to form processions as in the time of their Prior.

But in the monastery, secretly, an office was recited

which had been written expressly in commemoration of the martyr. Lorenzo Violi composed the *Apologia*, Fra Benedetto the *Vulnera Diligentis*. The Piagnoni poets wrote touching praises in memory of him. In one of their lyrical prayers they implore God to pardon the sinner for the sake of the pains suffered by Savonarola. The last verse reads thus:

Per la persecuzione et sua cattura,
Per lo processo suo falsificato,
Per la crudel et amara tortura,
Pel foco et croce in cui fu lapidato,
Pel fiume d'Arno.nel qual fu gittato,
Di Maggio, proprio a'ventitrè del mese,
Pel tuo Profeta martir ferrarese,
Ti priego che mi vogli perdonare.

(By his persecutions and arrest,
By his false trial,
By the cruel and bitter torture,
By the fire and the cross on which he was stoned
By the River of Arno where he was thrown
On the twenty-third of the month of May,
By Thy martyred Ferrarese Prophet
I pray Thee to grant me Thy forgiveness.)

During the period of persecution the faithful followers of Savonarola were wont to assemble in secret

Alinari

SAN PIETRO MARTIRE—SHOWING THE RESEMBLANCE TO SAVONAROLA
GALLERIA ANTICA E MODERNA, FLORENCE

communion to pray and meditate upon the words and sufferings of the master. In this particular environment, recalling so vividly the life and predictions of the Prophet, and while ecclesiastical corruption continued to increase, the prophecies assumed greater value, and were spread throughout Italy, inflaming the minds of the most easily excited. This gave rise to a heretical Savonarolian movement which resembled the Franciscan Fraticelli of the thirteenth century. Cerretani records "that about twenty of the Friar's followers—mostly of the lower class Florentines, established a secret church of their own—electing as their Pope a certain Pietro Bernardino, who had been a diligent listener to the sermons of Savonarola, and an assiduous reader of his writings. He was a man of about twenty-five—of short stature, with flashing black eyes, a visionary without culture, who knew by heart nearly the whole of the Bible.

His followers believed that he would be the first of a line of new Popes in a purified Church. His cry was: "The sword, the sword alone will renew the Church. Since the death of Savonarola there remaineth not one just man on earth." He posed as a prophet, and with oil blessed by himself he consecrated the places where his followers met for worship, and where he practised strange religious rites, praying only to the Holy Ghost. The Archbishop of Florence, together with the Council of the Eight, was obliged to institute

proceedings against these heretics, so that the new Church with their Pope had to leave the city, taking refuge in Mirandola with Conte Gian Francesco, who, being an ardent Savonarolian, welcomed them with open arms.

In a war which the Count waged against certain nobles, Pietro Bernardino promised him a victory over his enemies, but the Count being vanquished by them, Pietro was also taken prisoner, accused of heresy, and burnt.

During these years numerous so-called prophets made their appearance in the cities and in the villages of Italy, all following the example of Savonarola, threatening terrible punishments on the population and also on the Pope.

The most famous of these was Martino di Brozzi, a half-mad squint-eyed, ragged fanatic, who about the end of 1500 preached to the Florentines that: "God will punish Rome and Florence, for they had killed Savonarola; they had refused to believe in a wise prophet and therefore God has sent in my person a crazy prophet."

At the beginning of the sixteenth century there preached in the church of Santo Spirito a pale hermit named Girolamo da Bergamo, who prophesied the destruction of Rome, Venice, and Milan, and in 1513 the prophet of terror, Francesco da Montepulciano, appeared. Three years later Francesco da Meleto, son

of a Florentine father and a Turkish slave, prophesied the conversion of the Jews and the extermination of the Mussulmans. Then came Girolamo da Siena, a half-savage-looking hermit, who lived on bread, roots and water, and believed himself a new St. Paul, while at the same time in Rome a certain Fra Bonaventura aroused such enthusiasm that in a very short time his followers numbered 20,000. Like Savonarola, he advised the people to put their faith in the King of France, as a chosen instrument in the hands of God to renew the Church. In one of his writings, dedicated to the Doge of Venice, he compares the Roman Church to the "Woman" in the Apocalypse, and solemnly excommuicated the Pope—Leo X.

Nearly all these fell into the hands of the Pontiffs and were put to death.

. . . . . .

More fortunate—because infinitely greater than all other reformers, prophets and heretics who, following in the footsteps of the monk of Ferrara, thundered against the corruptions of Rome—was Martin Luther, the German Augustine. He also inscribed the name of Savonarola upon his flag of rebellion. In 1524 he republished in Strasbourg the Prophet's meditation on the *Miserere*, and in the preface says: "He was put to death solely for having desired that some one should come to purify the slough of Rome. Antichrist (the Pope) hoped that the memory of this great man would perish

under the maledictions heaped upon him. Jesus Christ by means of us canonises him, although the Pope and papists should burst with rage." Martin Luther seeks to describe Savonarola as a Protestant, deliberately forgetting the greatest of his works, *The Triumph of the Cross*, where he speaks of separation from the Roman Church as being equivalent to separation from Christ Himself. Luther's admiration for Savonarola was largely shared by all the theologians of the Teutonic schism, men like Verheiden, Wolfius, Vigner, Cappel, Illyricus, Duplessio-Mornay and many others.

No sadder fate can be imagined for a man of such undeviating Catholic faith than that which was reserved for the memory of Savonarola. The idea which animated him in all his efforts to purify the Church was so distorted and misunderstood that it caused numerous schisms and heresies. Some made of him a saint, some a leader of heresy and some even a hero of free-thought. He was none of these. In him was seen an intrepid Christian consciousness influenced by Judaism, deluded by a democratic ideal, and above all by a blind faith in the coming of a new Cyrus, personified in the King of France, in whom he saw a messenger of God. This his faith was not extinguished in Florence and eventually led the popular government to its ruin.

. . . . . .

Louis XII, who had ascended the throne on the death of Charles VIII, had tried to save the life of Fra

Girolamo, but the letter which he wrote earnestly begging them not to put him to death was withheld by the Arrabbiati, and only reached the Signory on June the 4th, ten days after the martyrdom. The Signory replied to it on June the 30th, announcing that the execution had already taken place, excusing themselves for "not having saved the life of Savonarola"—alleging that "the Pope himself had decreed his death." The Florentines Pilate-like washed their hands of his blood. The new French King, wishing to retain the place held by Charles in Italian politics, thought it well to reaffirm the idea that the Kings of France were invested with the divine mission of reforming the Church. He coined new money, one side of which bore his image, and the other the inscription *Perdam nomen Babylonis.*

It can be imagined with what joy the poor Piagnoni saw the attitude of Louis. They seemed to see the figure of the Prophet arising from the ashes of the stake. In fact, the Savonarolian political ideal returned to dominate the Republic, so that when Piero and Giuliano dei Medici were nearing Florence all the republicans pressed to the side of the French King. Even the Arrabbiati had to cease their persecutions of the Piagnoni and make common cause to defend their threatened liberty.

In 1499 the Piagnoni held all the chief public offices, and Piero Soderini was elected Gonfaloniere.

To commemorate—according to the biblical symbols of Savonarola—how the Florentines had defended themselves against the tyrants, Michelangelo's colossal statue of David was placed before the Palazzo. The monastery of San Marco, which had miraculously escaped the fire of the Arrabbiata, became once more the sanctuary and palladium of civil liberty and ancient faith.

On the 1st of November, 1503, Giuliano delle Rovere was elected Pope under the title of Julius II. He had been as much an admirer of Savonarola as he was the enemy of Alexander, but he followed wholeheartedly the political strategy of his predecessor. He also wished to drive away the foreigner—and in his cry: *Fuori i Barbari* (away with the barbarians), can be felt the warlike attitude which Michelangelo has introduced into the gigantic statue of Moses, the liberator of the Israelites, which is placed on the unfinished tomb of Julius, in Rome. The Pope found himself faced by many enemies, the worst being Louis XII of France and the Republic of Florence. Louis in 1511 asked the Florentines to convoke in Pisa (once again in their possession), a Council of Cardinals, most schismatic French ecclesiastics, to depose Julius from his throne. The Piagnoni, headed by Soderini, rebelling against the Pope who had in no wise offended them, gave in to the wish of the King of France. They betrayed the

cause of Italian liberty in homage to the fixed idea of their Prophet: "Lilies should flourish with lilies."

The Dominicans of San Marco understood the error and injustice of this act, but not so the fanatic Piagnoni. The Pope's wrath against the Florentines was unbounded, yet all the same it was in that same year that he allowed Raphael to place the picture of Savonarola in his famous "Disputa del Sacramento" in the Vatican. In the September of 1510, a Spanish army, ally of the Pope, entered Florence; and the rule of the Medici was once more restored. Then, after an interval of fifteen years, the political-religious ideals of Savonarola were once more felt by the people, and a great popular demonstration took place when it was known that Rome had been sacked.

Those Florentines who had been youths at the time of the Prophet had now become men, and fired by memories, they now prepared themselves to defend the liberty of the Republic, and solemnly declared Jesus Christ to be King of Florence. On the front of the Palazzo Pubblico, under the flaming monogram of Christ, was written:

REX REGUM ET DOMINUS DOMINANTIUM
(King of kings and Lord of lords.)

. . . . . .

The hours of the popular government were numbered, Florence was being strangled; she was sur-

rounded by her enemies, and Michelangelo hurried to defend her, employing his great genius in the works of fortification. But on August the 3rd, 1538, the Republican army was vanquished at Gavinana, when Francesco Ferrucci, the last and noblest gentleman of the ancient Commune, died gloriously.

In the Peace which was signed on August the 12th, in the imperial camp at Santa Margherita a Montici, between the Florentines, abandoned in their last hour by King Francis I, and the allies, the Tuscan city lost for ever her free government, and Alexander dei Medici, with the help of the Pope and by the wish of Charles V, became Sovereign Lord of Florence.

* * * * * * *

On the Piazza of the Signoria, scene of so many conflicts, so many rejoicings, and so many crimes, and on the site where the supreme crime was committed on the person of Savonarola, there was placed a marble group close to the David of Michelangelo, both groups typical of the sentiments which had prevailed in Florence, the one a symbol of the democratic Savonarolian ideal, the other a group by Bandinella, which shows Hercules as conqueror of Caco, who kneels at his feet —a victorious symbol of Tyranny.

Some years ago a tablet was let into the ground to commemorate the death of Savonarola on that spot, and

it is not unusual to see bunches of flowers which admirers of the Prophet have placed there in remembrance of the courageous martyr, whose humble prayer was "Vulnera cor meum charitate tua."

THE END

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